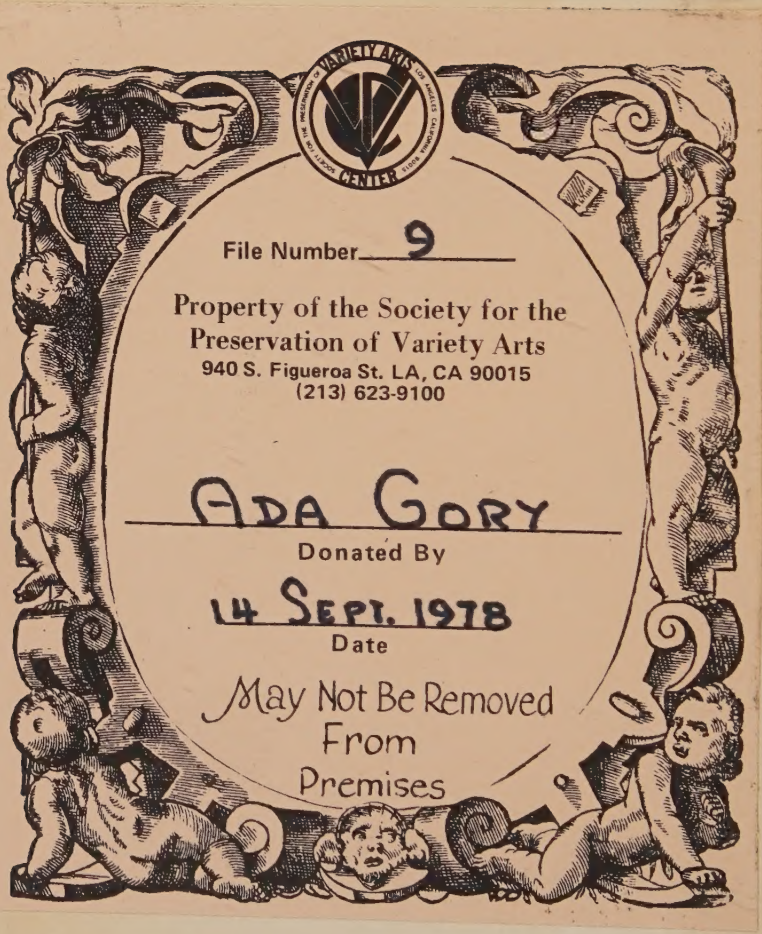
THE BARKER

BY

KENYON NICHOLSON



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GOWDY'S
BIG
CITY SHOWS
GOWDY'S
BIG CITY SHO

THE BARKER

A PLAY OF CARNIVAL
LIFE IN THREE ACTS

BY

KENYON NICHOLSON

SAMUEL FRENCH
Incorporated 1898
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TO LUCILE NIKOLAS

"The Barker" was produced by Charles L. Wagner (in association with Edgar Selwyn) at the Biltmore Theatre in New York, January 18th, 1927, with the following cast:

Nifty Miller ..... *Walter Huston*
Hap Spissel ..... *Al Roberts*
T-Bone ..... *Philip Heegee*
Pop Morgan ..... *Albert Hyde*
A Hick ..... *Ross Hertz*
Carrie ..... *Eleanor Williams*
Colonel Gowdy ..... *George Barbier*
Lou ..... *Claudette Colbert*
Sailor West ..... *John Irwin*
Chris Miller ..... *Norman Foster*
Maw Benson ..... *Florence Gerald*
Doc Rice ..... *Raymond Bramley*
Cleo ..... *Mae Hopkins*

Under the Direction of
PRIESTLY MORRISON

"The Barker" was produced by Charles L. Wagner (in association with Edgar Selwyn) at the Blackstone Theatre in Chicago, April 24, 1927, with the following cast:

Nifty Miller ..... *Richard Bennett*
Hap Spissel ..... *Donald McMillan*
T-Bone ..... *Charles Allais*
Pop Morgan ..... *Charles E. Siegel*
A Hick ..... *John Gray*
Carrie ..... *Marjorie Wood*
Colonel Gowdy ..... *Walter Law*
Lou ..... *Helen Flint*
Sailor West ..... *Tom Blake*
Chris Miller ..... *Owen Davis, Jr.*
Maw Benson ..... *Gwen De Lany*
Doc Rice ..... *Philip Heegee*
Cleo ..... *Adelaide Kendall*

Under the Direction of
PRIESTLY MORRISON

"The Barker" was produced by Edward Belasco (by arrangement with Charles L. Wagner and Edgar Selwyn) at the Belasco Theatre in Los Angeles, May 9, 1927, with the following cast:

Nifty Miller.....*Louis Bennison*
Hap Spissel.....*James Donlan*
T-Bone.....*Robert Shaw*
Pop Morgan.....*Joseph Buckley*
A Hick.....*Frederick Wagner*
Carrie.....*Mabel Julienne Scott*
Colonel Gowdy.....*Robert Homans*
Lou.....*Isabel Withers*
Sailor West.....*John De Weese*
Chris Miller.....*Curtis Arnall*
Maw Benson.....*Fanny Rice*
Doc Rice.....*John Wagner*
Cleo.....*Carolin Terrill*

Under the Direction of
FRED BUTLER

"Into each life some shade must fall.
Unto each show some bloomers must come,
But who'd think where buildings are tall
Business could be so dad-burned bum?
Yet us troupers take the bitter and sweet
And look forward to the "Sunday run,"
Doll ourselves up, strive to look neat,
Hopefully saying: "Next week may be a good one!"

—From an anonymous contributor in THE BILLBOARD'S *Midway Confab* Column.

CHARACTERS

(In the order of their appearance)

HAP SPISSELL

POP MORGAN

DOC RICE

T-BONE

MAW BENSON

SAILOR WEST

NIFTY MILLER

CARRIE

LOU

CHRIS MILLER

COLONEL GOWDY

CLEO

THE HAWAIIAN TRIO ..... *Townspeople*

All the scenes take place on the lot of the Gowdy Big City Shows.

THE BARKER

ACT ONE

Scene I

Setting: The front of the Hawaiian Show, on the lot, Shelbyville, Ill.

Time: About eleven o'clock at night.

At Rise: CARRIE *is doing a few dance steps on the bally platform to the accompaniment of an Hawaiian guitar and two ukeleles played by three doubtful natives, who are beside her on the platform.* NIFTY, *with a long stick and megaphone, is drumming up a crowd.* HAP *is inside the ticket-box and* T-BONE *is stationed at the entrance of the tent as ticket-taker. Above the music they are shouting "Right this way, folks" and "All ready—all ready!" The ballyhoo is going in full blast. A group of townsfolk stand before the front, backs to the audience, watching the performers.*

Offstage are heard the usual carnival noises: the shooting-gallery, the high-striker, the merry-go-round, etc.

After a few moments CARRIE *brings her dance to a close with a sudden whirl and shout. Then* NIFTY *begins his "spiel."*

NIFTY

Ladies and gentlemen, you've seen our free outside exhibition, an' now I'm goin' to ask you to step in

a little closer so's I can tell you just what we got to entertain you on the inside. (*Pausing impressively.*) You are now standin' in front of the big feature attraction of Colonel Gowdy Big City Shows. (*At attention.*) The biggest show for the money that has ever played your beautiful little city! It's a show full of spicy dancing; a show full of peppy dancing. On the inside you'll see Princess Kalima, The Pride of Sunny Honolulu. (CARRIE *makes a curtsey as the musicians strike a chord.*) She'll do her famous dance that's made her notorious throughout the civilized world. She'll show you how they shake their shredded wheat on the beach at Waikiki. And when she dances, folks, she makes old men young and young men old. Every fiber, every tissue in her entire anatomy shakes like a jar of jelly from your grandmother's thanksgiving dinner. Then you'll be entertained by the Royal Hawaiian Trio (*The musicians acknowledge the introduction.*) playin' an' singin' hauntin' melodies from those far-off islands in the Pacific, an' if you don't say when you come out that it's the biggest show you ever saw, we'll refund your money as cheerfully as we take it from you. Now, folks, it's gettin' late an' I ain't goin' to hold you no longer. The tent is full o' people waitin' to see the show; so you're just in time. This is positively and *absolutely* the last big show of the evening. As a special advertising price tonight the admission is a dime, ten cents. A tenth of a dollar! A dime takes you all the way through—it's something you can't afford to miss. So make up your mind, folks, if you care to pay it a visit. Remember, it's the big feature show

of the midway! All ready! The box-office is open, the performers retire, an' the show starts right away! (*With* NIFTY's *last words, the Hawaiian Trio gives a shout and with* CARRIE *exit into the tent.* T-BONE *and* HAP *take up the cry of "All ready, a dime, ten cents!"* T-BONE *starts the unafon.* NIFTY *seems to draw the crowd to the box-office with his gesturing, for most of the townspeople straggle up to the box and purchase tickets and pass inside.* NIFTY *keeps up his patter of "Don't fail to pay it a visit —the big feature show of the midway!" until most of the crowd has either gone in the tent or passed on. As the music starts inside,* T-BONE *turns off the barrel-organ and* NIFTY *lights a cigarette.*) (NOTE: *The music from the performance continues at intervals throughout the scene to indicate the progress of the show.*) Thank God, that's over! (*Feeling throat.*) My throat's as raw as a piece o' beefsteak.

[*Takes flask from hip and drinks.*

HAP (*counting dimes*)

Well, Nifty, she looks like we wuz goin' to get a little dough in this burg yet. We done fifty-three flat —that's eighteen berries moren' last night.

NIFTY (*gruffly*)

Time we hit a red one.

HAP

It's sure comin' to us. Jese, any more rain an' th' Colonel'll hafta turn this here outfit o' hisn' inta a boat show. I'll be buggered ef I ever see sech a lousy break in weather sense I been troupin'.

[*A* YOUNG MAN *and his* GIRL *stroll on, right. The* YOUNG MAN *in pantomime asks the girl if she wants to see the show.* SHE *indicates that she does. The* YOUNG MAN *takes a card from his pocket and presents it to* NIFTY.

NIFTY

We're always glad to have any newspaper boys as the guest of the management. Take your escort and pass right in free of charge.

YOUNG MAN (*taking girl's arm as* T-BONE *holds the flap open deferentially.*)

[*They pass into the tent.*

NIFTY

T-Bone, beat it back an' tell Carrie to soft-pedal her dance. There's critics out front.

T-BONE

Sure.

NIFTY

An' tell her we're goin' to a dance uptown at the Moose Lodge after we shut down here, an' to dress up.

T-BONE

You mean in her Hywaiian clothes?

NIFTY

Listen, stupid! Tell her to put on her best.

[T-BONE *nods and goes meekly into the tent.*

HAP

If I wuz as dumb as him I'd jump in a waterin' trough an' drown myself.

NIFTY

I ain't never caught him at it, but I think he's a hop-head.

HAP

Well, ef this wuz *my* racket, he wouldn't be round here.

NIFTY

Soon's I find somebody else he's goin' to get the air. (POP MORGAN *comes on left. He carries a pitchman's satchel loaded with bags of confetti and is holding onto a bunch of toy balloons.*) (*More gently.*) Well, Pop, how's tricks?

POP (*wearily*)

Ain't so good, Nifty.
[*Sighing.*

NIFTY

Well, you'll get the breaks yet, Pop.

POP

I dunno . . . maybe.
[*Exits right.*

HICK (*enters—comes out of the tent*)

(*loudly*)
I wanta see the manager of this here show!

HAP

I ain't deef! There he is.

NIFTY

What can I do for you, my friend?

HICK

I handed this feller a five-dollar note fer two seats to this danged show, and he gives me only $1.80 in change.

[*Exhibits money.*

NIFTY

Well, we'll look into it. (*To* HAP.) Mr. Spissell, this gentleman says you handed him one-eighty out of a five.

HAP (*innocently*)

He gave me a two-dollar bill—I never seen no five.

HICK

You're a liar!

NIFTY

Now, now, that's purty strong language for one gentleman to use to another. My friend, you should have spoke of the mistake when it was made.

HICK

I didn't notice till I got inside. All you show-folks is crooks; they'd oughtn'ta let you come amongst decent people. I'm a member of the Town Council and I'm gonna look into this!

NIFTY (*his manner changing*)

Wait, my friend—wait. If you feel you been cheated I'll pay you the difference outa my *own* pocket. (*He takes money out of his pocket and pays* HICK. *Nobly.*) I've known Mr. Spissell for ten years an' to my knowledge this is the first time he's ever been

accused of makin' a mistake in change. He's the soul of honor.

HICK (*sheepishly*)

That's mighty nice of you—I don't like to take your money.

NIFTY

We're in business to satisfy our patrons. You better hurry inside, the show's going on.

HICK (*pulling out card*)

If I can do anything for you during your stay here, let me know. I didn't catch the name . . . ?

NIFTY

Miller—Nifty Miller.

HICK (*shaking his hand*)

I sure am glad to know you, Mr. Miller. I take back what I said about your being crooks.

[*The* HICK *goes inside the tent.*

HAP (*disgusted*)

I thought he wuz goin' to kiss yuh!

NIFTY (*severely*)

Ain't you got more gumption than to short-change a city official?

HAP

How'd I know? I picked him for a boob on account o' his necktie. (HAP *hands* NIFTY *his three dollars.*) Jese, it's gettin' so you can't tell who to shake down these days!

NIFTY

Well, go easy. We don't want any more squawks. First thing you know the Colonel'll get wind o' it.

HAP (*sighing*)

If they didn't want to get trimmed, what the hell they doin' here? I b'lieve in gettin' their wad while the gettin's good. I'm goin' over to th' offus-wagon.

[HAP *takes up bag of money and goes out, left.*

[CARRIE *appears in the tent entrance.*

CARRIE (*whispering*)

Come here a minute, Nifty!

NIFTY

You can come out. There's no one around. What you want?

CARRIE (*coming down*)

I just wanta talk to you. It gets lonesome back there in the dressing-room. We're goin' to the dance, T-Bone says.

NIFTY

We'll drop in for a while. We're in here under the Moose an' we got to play up to it.

CARRIE (*slipping her arm around his shoulder, still standing*)

Nifty, how much do you love me?

NIFTY (*patting her*)

You goin' to start that again?

CARRIE

Well, a girl likes to be told.

NIFTY

You're my dame, ain't you?

CARRIE

I know, but I get scared sometimes I'm goin' to lose you.

NIFTY

You ain't goin' to lose me.

CARRIE (*passionately*)

You know, Nifty, there ain't nobody in the world for me but you. You got me spoiled for any other guy. That's why I want a ring; so's I'll have some hold on you.

NIFTY

I told you why I can't marry you. You don't seem to remember I got a kid to put through college. An' it ain't gonna be any of your cheap colleges either. It's a law college and it's gonna cost me plenty. I'm gonna see that he gets the things that I missed. Gee, that kid's a wonder. Got brains too, an' livin' on the farm made him a husky little devil. (*Looking closely at* CARRIE.) Why you ain't even lissenin'.

CARRIE

You told me all that before.

NIFTY (*amused*)

I swear if you ain't jealous of the kid!

CARRIE (*pouting*)

I get sick of always hearing about him.

NIFTY (*patting her*)

Now that ain't no way to talk. I ain't gonna stay in this lousy carnival racket always. When I come to settle down there's time enough to talk about marryin'.

CARRIE

If I only thought I could trust you . . .

NIFTY

Did I ever two-time you? Ain't I been on the level?

CARRIE

Sure you have.

NIFTY

Well, then—just ferget it, an' leave it to me.

CARRIE (*impetuously*)

Give me a kiss, Nifty.

NIFTY

Out here in the midway?

CARRIE

There ain't no one around.

NIFTY (*pleased*)

You little son of a gun!

CARRIE (*kissing him*)

I don't know what the hell makes me so crazy about you!

NIFTY

You're all right, kid. I'll hand it to you. Now beat it. Here comes the Colonel.

[CARRIE *kisses him again passionately and then darts back into tent.* HE *looks after her fondly.*
[COLONEL GOWDY *strolls on, left.*

COLONEL

Well, Nifty, how much did we do this fine evening?

NIFTY

Fifty-three smackers even.
[*Hawaiian music stops and there is applause from the tent. Then music starts again.*

COLONEL

Not bad, not bad. (*Consulting his notebook.*) You beat the Atheletic Show eight dollars. And you're just a few dollars behind the Palace of Illusions. I always said when we got into this corn country we'd get top money. Farmers are good spenders when they've got it. How's Carrie, Nifty?

NIFTY

Fine as silk. She an' me're droppin' in on the Moose dance after a while.

COLONEL

That's right. I like to see my troupers mixing up with the townsfolk. Creates good feeling.

NIFTY

You an' Lou takin' it in?

COLONEL

Well . . . no. Lou and I had a little tiff this evening, and for the present she doesn't care for my company.

NIFTY (*jokingly*)

The way you two spar you'd think you was married. Why don't you behave yourself like Carrie an' me?

COLONEL

I don't fool myself. I mean nothing to Lou. While you and Carrie—well, Nifty, you seem to have the knack of holding her. I never saw a female under better control.

[LOU *comes on left. Ignoring the* COLONEL *she turns to* NIFTY.

LOU

Say, Nifty, tell Carrie to stop by my room when she comes down to the hotel, will you? I wanta see her.

NIFTY

She'll be late—we're takin' in that shindig up at the Moose.

COLONEL (*breaking in*)

Lou, won't you reconsider your hastiness in refusing——

LOU (*viciously*)

Not a chance! Don't come honeyin' round me after what *you* done.

COLONEL

It was only for your own good.

LOU

Well, I'll be the judge o' that, see? Just keep outa my way.

COLONEL (*laughing sheepishly*)

Well, Nifty, as I always say, girls are like street cars—miss one and there'll be another along in a minute.

LOU

Yeh, but they don't come along like me.

COLONEL

Oh, you're nothing to stop the traffic. What have you got but a bag of bedroom tricks? . . . Nifty, I think I'll drop in and listen to the music a while. You know, music hath charms to soothe the savage beast.

NIFTY

I'll go with you, Colonel.

COLONEL (*at exit*)

When you decide to come off your high-horse, drop around to the office-wagon to see me, Lou. I'll take you back.

LOU

Ain't you good to me! Go on, you old possum-belly, I'll throw a moth in your moustache!

[NIFTY *and* COLONEL *go into the tent.*

HAP

What's he been up to now, Lou?

LOU (*lighting a cigarette*)

If I told you you'd know, wouldn't you?

HAP (*testily*)

Well, sister, ef you think I'm goin' t' beg you t' find out you're all wet.

[*He turns to go.*

LOU (*suddenly*)

Wait a minute, Hap. . . . Say, Hap, you gotta saw you can spare me till pay night?

HAP

Broke again, eh?

LOU

Well, will you or won't you?

HAP

Needn't get so huffy. Jest don't ferget where you got it. Here.

[HAP *hands her two five-dollar bills.*

LOU

Thanks. I'm not askin' it for myself. Soon's I can get a money-order it's goin' home. You know, ever since I been out I send the old lady ten bucks a week, an' I had the dough this mornin'. Then—like a simp—I sat in a game of stud with that bunch of sharpshooters over in Whitey's tent this afternoon, an' they sent me to the cleaners. Took me for fifteen rollers in less'n an hour. Oh, I'm not kickin'. Nobody made me get in their game.

HAP

So that's why yer sore at the Colonel. You put th' bee on him an' he turned you down.

LOU

Cold. . . . An' him that's got more money than spots on a guinea hen. . . . You know why, don't you? He thinks if he can keep me broke it'll make me more dependent-like on him. But I lit inta him right—what I called *him* was nobody's business. I sez "You're so tight," I sez, "you wouldn't give ice-water to your grandmother!" . . . I don't care if he is the big shot on this racket, I ain't scared o' him. For a plugged nickel I'd blow anyways.

HAP (*sympathetically*)

With him it's allus Big Me and Little You. There ain't another jane on the show'd do what you done for him.

LOU

Well, him and me are *fini*. From now on when I do my sinnin' I'm goin' to get the jack first.

[*Hawaiian music stops as applause is heard from the tent. Then music starts again.*

[SAILOR WEST *strolls in, left.*

SAILOR (*walking by*)

What do you say, Hap? Hullo, Lou.

HAP

What's yer rush, Sailor?

SAILOR (*stopping*)

I got me a date with a swell little town broad.

HAP

Do any good tonight?

SAILOR

Hell no! They don't know what tattooin' means this far from the ocean. I wisht I'd stayed in Brooklyn. Where's Nifty?

LOU

Inside.

SAILOR

I jest come past the offus-wagon an' they was somebody lookin' fer him.

HAP (*suspiciously*)

It wuzn't no skirt?

SAILOR

Naw. A lad.

HAP

Say what he wanted?

SAILOR

Prob'ly lookin' fer a job er somethin'.

HAP

What'd he look like?

SAILOR

How do I know? Like as not he'll be over here, an' you can see fer yourself. (*Sidling over to her.*) How's snake-charmin', Lou?

LOU

Rotten.

SAILOR

They tell me that big di'mond-back rattler died on you yest'day.

LOU

He starved hisself to death. Couldn't get him to eat nothin'. We put a rabbit and a chicken in the pit an' he shied away from 'em like he was scared they'd bite *him.*

HAP

They can't stand so much handlin', that's sure.

LOU

I told Duke if he was goin' to have me bally every five minutes he couldn't expect to keep his snakes alive.

SAILOR

Them Brounsville snakes ain't what they used to be. Yer lucky if you get one now'days thet'll last out a season. . . . Well, so long. . . . See you in the poor-house.

[SAILOR *exits, right.*

LOU

Well, I guess I'll be gettin' on down to *my* dump. Only thing I get much pleasure outa anymore is sleepin'.

[LOU *starts to walk away.* CHRIS *enters from left.* [HE *stands staring at the banners of the front, absorbed by the wonder of them. He accosts* HAP.

CHRIS

Say, can you tell me is Mr. Miller the manager o' this show?

HAP

What do you want him about?

CHRIS (*uncertainly*)

I—I'd rather tell it to him—if it's all the same . . .

HAP (*smiling*)

You would, would you? Well, you wait here an' I'll see what I c'n do for you. (*Grinning.*) S'pose you c'n keep him entertained while I'm gone, Lou?

[HAP *exits into tent.*

LOU (*sizing him up*)

You live here in town, big boy?

CHRIS

No, I'm from near Niles, Michigan.

LOU (*laughing*)

What you doin' so far from that big city?

CHRIS (*amiably*)

Sorta lookin' over the country.

LOU (*lifting her skirt a trifle*)

Have a good look! It won't cost you nothin'.

CHRIS (*blushing*)

I reckon you're one of the actresses, ain't you?

LOU

How'd you guess it, handsome?

CHRIS

I can tell by the way you're painted up!

LOU (*laughing*)

Don't you care for my schoolgirl complexion?

CHRIS (*naïvely*)

Sure. It makes you look awful fresh and purty.

LOU (*pleased*)

Say, boy, you work fast! What's your name?

CHRIS

Chris Miller—same's my dad.

LOU (*astounded*)

You don't mean Nifty Miller's your old man!
[*As* LOU *recovers she bursts into laughter.*

CHRIS

What's so funny about that?

LOU

Well, who'd ever thought Nifty had a kid as big as you . . . ! Where you been keepin' yourself?

CHRIS

I been goin' to school. But I come to see if paw won't let me travel with your show.

LOU

Well, welcome to our city! . . . Wait till Carrie hears about *you* bein' here.

CHRIS

Who's she?

LOU

Carrie? Oh, she's the hooch-dancer—Princess Kalima. And a friend of your daddy's. (*Pointedly.*) A very *special* friend, you might say. . . . (NIFTY *appears at the top of the steps, followed by* HAP.

LOU *turns and sees him. Enjoying the situation.*)
Old home week, Nifty! See who's here.
[NIFTY *stares at* CHRIS, *hardly believing his eyes.*
CHRIS *looks up at* NIFTY, *grinning embarrassedly.*

NIFTY (*overwhelmed*)
Well, I'll be God——! Where's your hat?

LOU (*with mock reproof*)
That's no way to welcome your long-lost son, Nifty. Askin' him where his hat is. Rush up an' throw your arms——

NIFTY (*still staring*)
Shut up, Lou!

LOU (*turning to go*)
Whyn't you tell us, Nifty, you was a proud father? He's some sheik, too. Better watch him close. He's already told me he likes painted ladies.

NIFTY
G'wan, beat it.

LOU (*to* CHRIS)
See you later, kid.
[LOU *goes off, right.*

HAP (*advancing to* CHRIS)
So yer Nifty's youngun! (*Offering hand.*) I'm Hap Spissell.

NIFTY (*impatiently*)
Hap, go inside and stay with the Colonel. An' don't say nothin' yet about—him.
[*Indicates* CHRIS.

HAP (*chuckling*)

Yer daddy talks like he wuz ashamed o' you, but he ain't. You jest oughta hear him blowin' you up to th' skies round here.

[HAP *goes into the tent.*

NIFTY

What did you do—run off from Ella an' your grandpa?

CHRIS

They knew I was leavin'. Only thing, I wasn't just sure how I'd find you. (*Grinning.*) Wanta know how I did it? In a poolroom up in South Bend night before last I met a actor readin' a copy of the *Billboard.* I said you was in a carnival. He looked you up and saw that the Gowdy's Big City Shows played Shelbyville this week; so I took the first freight out for here.

NIFTY (*displeased*)

Ridin' freights, are you?

CHRIS (*brushing dust from coat*)

Nobody bothered me none. I kept hid in a car of cement.

NIFTY

Didn't you have no money?

CHRIS

Grandpa wouldn't give me none when he found out what I was goin' to do.

NIFTY

Well, you're a fine one, I must say! Runnin' away! I ought to get you put in the reformatory. . . .

Why didn't you stay on the farm where you belong? What's the good o' me shellin' out good money to get you educated if you're goin' to be a bum?

CHRIS

I'm not goin' to be a bum. School's let out for the summer. Aw, Paw, I don't want to go against you, but I got so restless I couldn't make myself stay up there. Nothin' to do but hoe sugar beets or spray fruit—nowheres to go and nobody much to talk to. It used to nearly drive me crazy to be out in the field ploughin' and watch old No. 52 come whizzing past on the Michigan Central, an' see all them people in nice clothes goin' places. Chicago, Detroit, New York. . . . I want to travel and see things. Same as you.

NIFTY (*drily*)

It's a wonder you didn't join the navy.

CHRIS

There's nothin' on the farm but eat, sleep and work. Oh, I ain't lazy. Grandpa'll tell you that. But stayin' in one place all the time . . . ! Every day same as every other day. Nothin' new—it gets on a feller's nerves.

NIFTY

So you thought you had to come to me.

CHRIS

You're my dad, ain't you? I thought you'd kinda be glad to see me. You kept writin' you wished you could see me.

NIFTY

I—I am glad to see you, Chris, but I didn't expect you'd—I'll come to see you this winter same's I did last year.

CHRIS

It's a long time to wait, seems to me. Since Mom died you're the only close blood-kin I got and we'd —well—we'd oughta sorta get acquainted.

NIFTY (*softening*)

You sure have growed up since I seen you last. Let's see, you're nineteen, ain't you?

CHRIS

Goin' on twenty, and big for my age at that.

NIFTY

It don't hardly seem possible . . . !

CHRIS

I was born in 1907—August 14th.

NIFTY

1907. . . . You sure give your mother a lotta trouble when you come. It was in St. Joe, Missouri. We was out that season with Cherokee Bill's medicine show. (*Chuckling reminiscently.*) I went for the doc an' before I could get back you'd already arrived, an' was yellin' bloody murder.

CHRIS

Mom used to joke that I was born in a theatrical trunk. Remember? When I was only a little tike I'd plague her to tell me about how the three of us

would go round the country together, but she wouldn't do it only when gran'pa wasn't listenin'.

NIFTY

How is the old gentleman?

CHRIS

Same as ever. When I do anything bad, Gran'pa'll say, "Shame on you, now you're actin' like your Paw." I used to once in a while do things he didn't like just to hear him say it.

NIFTY (*pleased*)

You did, didja?

CHRIS

He don't understand anybody like us, with restless natures.

NIFTY (*amused*)

You think you're a chip off the old block, do you?

CHRIS

I reckon I must be. I wanta do the things you do, travel around and all. . . . (*The Hawaiian music stops—Applause. Then the music starts again. Hesitantly.*) I'm hopin' you'll see your way clear to takin' me along with you . . .

NIFTY (*sternly*)

Well, get that outa your head right now! What you s'pose I been sendin' money to keep you in school for? To end up by messin' round with carnivals? No siree! You're goin' to amount to somethin'. You *got* to, Chris. You ain't forgettin' you're goin' to be a lawyer, are you?

CHRIS

No. I'm goin' to be a lawyer like you said, but this here's vacation. (*He looks over his shoulder at the banners.*)

NIFTY

Trouble with you, Chris, you got the idea most suckers have about troupin'. You think all there is to it is rarin' round havin' a good time and whoopin' it up. All you hear is the band playin' an' the crowds enjoyin' theirselves. You got no idea what goes on back o' these here tents.

CHRIS

That's what I come for—to find out.

NIFTY

Well, you're not goin' to get the chance! I ain't havin' you mixin' up with these punks. It ain't no decent way to live.

CHRIS

If I'm goin' to be a lawyer—don't you think I gotta know somethin' about life?

NIFTY

You can learn all you need to know outa schoolbooks. Where'd you s'pose I'd be now if I'd minded the old gentleman and got me an education? Prob'ly a bank president, or a lawyer myself. I tell you, Chris, as I've wrote you in letters many a time: A guy in this day an' age without the proper schoolin' ain't got a *Chinaman's* chance. Education'll get you money, a good name and swell friends to pal

with. I ain't had none o' them because I was pig-headed. (*Pause.*) I know what I'm talkin' about!

CHRIS

But, Paw, I only want to travel with you while it's vacation. I'll go back to school when it opens up. After I been on the road for a summer I'll be good and ready to get down to studyin' again, see if I won't.

NIFTY

Lissen, no use tryin' to argue me inta it! You're goin' back, an' the sooner the better. I ain't takin' no chances.

[COLONEL GOWDY *enters at top of steps.*

COLONEL

Carrie's certainly as neat a little dancer as I've seen in my day. Nifty, you ought to be mighty proud of her.

NIFTY

Colonel, I'd like to make you acquainted with my son. Son, this is Colonel Gowdy, who owns the whole racket.

COLONEL (*eyeing* CHRIS)

Your son! Is *this* the boy I've been hearing about! Well, I must say, Nifty, he's an improvement on the original. Shake hands with the Colonel, lad. Happy to know you.

[CHRIS *takes the* COLONEL'S *hand diffidently.*

NIFTY

His name's Chris, too. His mother called him after me.

COLONEL (*pumping* CHRIS's *hand*)

Thinking of making a showman out of him, Nifty?

NIFTY

Not while I'm in my right mind.

COLONEL

Oh, yes, this is the lad who's goin' into the legal profession. (*Bombastically.*) Law—an honorable profession. All our great statesmen——

CHRIS (*blurting it out*)

Will you give me a job with your carnival?

COLONEL (*amused*)

The young Blackstone wants to be a showman *pro tem,* does he? Well, now, that'll take some thinking about.

[*Hawaiian music stops. There is a patter of applause from the inside of the tent.* T-BONE *and* HAP *enter and take their posts at entrance to tent.*

NIFTY

Stand to one side. Here comes the crowd.

[*The* COLONEL *and* CHRIS *stand to the left of the box-office as the crowd files out of the tent in twos and threes. One or two stop to comment on the performance to* NIFTY. *Others express approbation or disapproval among themselves. In a moment or two they have passed on down the midway, exiting both sides.* T-BONE *goes into tent.*

COLONEL (*to* CHRIS)

So you want to try your hand at the show business, do you? (*Winking at* NIFTY.) What you say,

Nifty, we make him head horseshoer on the merry-go-round? (*To* CHRIS.) Why don't you ask your father, here, for a job? He runs this show for me.

CHRIS (*pleading*)

Won't you, Paw? I won't be no trouble. I'll go back to school in the fall, and be a lawyer like you want me to. You won't be sorry—honest you won't!

COLONEL

He's got spunk. Why not give him a trial, Nifty?

NIFTY

Well, I'll tell you what, Chris, if the Colonel says so, I'll——

CHRIS (*overjoyed*)

You will!

NIFTY

Wait a minute till I finish! I'll take you on, but if you don't behave yourself an' mind me, you'll be shipped back to the farm right off. How about it, Colonel?

COLONEL

Certainly. Take him. . . . Let's feel your muscle, son. (CHRIS *flexes his arm.*) That's the stuff. I wish I had a boy like you. Nifty, I always said you had more luck than any one man deserved. Well, good luck, my boy. (*Expansively.*) We're one big happy family here. You'll soon get accustomed to our ways.

CHRIS (*respectfully*)

Yes, sir . . .

COLONEL

And who knows, you may want to give up law and become a real dyed-in-the-wool mud showman.

NIFTY

Now don't go puttin' that in his head. He's give his word to go back to his studies when school opens up.

COLONEL

Well, I always say, the show business is like a bad disease. Once you get it in your system there's no cure for you. Only, it's a disease you don't want to get over once you got it.

[COLONEL *goes out, right.*

CHRIS (*impressed*)

He's certainly a fine old gentleman.

NIFTY

The biggest windbag in the business. (*Turning to* HAP.) Hap—where's T-bone?

HAP

Inside.

NIFTY

Tell him he's fired.

HAP (*astounded*)

What!

NIFTY

You heard me. (*Suppressing his pride.*) I gotta new man for his job. . . . Don't stand there lookin' like that! Get a move on!

[HAP *goes into tent.*

CHRIS (*admiringly*)

Gee, Paw, you sure know how to make 'em step. . . . What's my job goin' to be?

NIFTY (*gruffly*)

Anything you're told. First thing, you need a good wash, and a new front—Bring any clothes with you?

CHRIS

I didn't want to be bothered with a suitcase.

NIFTY

First thing tomorrow, I'll send you down to buy a suit. I can't have 'em takin' you for a tramp round here. An' we gotta get word to Ella and Paw where you're at. Then, I'll take you over to the cook-house an' get you a dukie——

CHRIS

What's a dukie?

NIFTY

Dukie! Meal ticket. (*Wonderingly.*) God, kid, you're green . . . !

CHRIS (*eagerly*)

I learn fast. You'll see . . .

NIFTY

This here's no Sunday-school, an' they's a lotta things you ain't *goin'* to learn, if I can help it . . .

[CARRIE *appears at the top of the steps. She is in her street clothes.* HAP *follows, remaining on top step.* HAP *switches out the lights on the front.*

CARRIE

All ready, Nifty. How's that for gettin' out of the old make-up? Maybe you think I didn't hustle. Can't keep the Loyal Order of Moose waitin', can we?

NIFTY

Come here, Carrie.

CARRIE (*descending steps*)

What you want?

NIFTY (*hesitantly*)

Chris has turned up.

CARRIE

Chris!

NIFTY

You know—the kid.

CARRIE (*staring at* CHRIS)

Is—is this your kid!

NIFTY

That's what I said.

CARRIE

What's he doin' round here?

NIFTY

He's come to see me. It's his vacation. I'm goin' to try him out on T-Bone's job for the summer. Chris, come here an' shake hands with Carrie.

[CHRIS *advances. Offers his hand to* CARRIE, *who ignores it.*

CHRIS

Pleased to meet—you.

CARRIE (*viciously*)

Well, I'll be damned if I can say the same for you.

NIFTY (*threateningly*)

Now look here, Carrie. You two gotta be good friends. You heär me? I said good friends. An' that goes! (*There is a pause.*) Hap, you show Chris where he can wash up, then get him a room at the hotel. I'd do it myself, Chris, only Carrie and me are expected to a dance uptown. It's purty important, see? Hap'll take care of you.

HAP

Sure, boss.

NIFTY

See you in the mornin', kid. (HE *crosses to* CARRIE *and takes her arm.*) Come on, Carrie. Sweeten up —you look like you'd swallowed a pint o' vinegar! [NIFTY *and* CARRIE *move off, leaving* CHRIS *staring after them.*

Curtain.

ACT ONE

Scene II

Setting: It is the combination dressing-room and "green room" of the Hawaiian Show. At back an entrance from the stage, which is framed by a divided red plush curtain. Supporting the canvas walls at intervals are side-poles. A center pole, downstage, to which is attached a single electric light bulb. To the left of pole a large blue crate, painted a vivid circus blue. At left, downstage, a folding iron cot. To the right and back of it a pile of old canvas, props, cases for musical instruments, etc. A lighted oil stove near the cot. At right, a mirror, framed in electric lights resting on a crate. There are several folding chairs about the interior. To the right, upstage, an open wardrobe trunk with some of CARRIE'S *street-clothes strewn about. A wire is stretched from the center pole to the first side-pole to the right. This wire holds a thin curtain on rings, which gives* CARRIE *some seclusion when she is dressing for a performance. Trampled grass underfoot. Lines of tattered flags of all nations overhead.*

Time: Ten days later. Afternoon. Cambridge, Ill.

At Rise: The COLONEL, MAW BENSON *and* LOU *are seated on stools about the blue box engaged in a game of "rummy."* HAP *is near the oil stove, in his undershirt, bending over a bucket and small washboard. The*

weather is abnormally cold. MAW *and* LOU *wear coats. For a few moments the three play in silence, interrupted only by an occasional grunt from* HAP *as he scrubs away on a shirt.*

[SAILOR *enters and crosses down to stove.*

SAILOR

Hullo, gamblers. . . . We had a short summer, didn't we?

LOU

Know any more funny jokes?

SAILOR

Say, Colonel, you been 'round the water show lately?

COLONEL

What's the matter now?

SAILOR

I jest come from there, an' I don't wanta start nothin', but Ruby Gordon sez she ain't goin' to leave Spike go in th' tank tonight.

COLONEL (*irritably*)

And why not?

SAILOR

She sez his cough's got worse, an' she ain't goin' to have him ketch th' pneumonia fer nobody. She's over t' th' offus-wagon now t' see you 'bout it.

COLONEL (*rising*)

She is, is she! Well, he'll give a show tonight, or I'll break their contract.

MAW

Hey, what about our game o' rummy?

COLONEL

It'll have to wait. They're too many on this lot trying to tell me what they'll do and what they won't do! Insubordination, that's what it is. And I won't have it—not while I'm running this shebang!

[*The* COLONEL *picks up his cane and stalks out.*

LOU

There goes our game to hell. Sailor, you take his hand.

SAILOR

Me? You don't get me to play cards with no women!

MAW

Hap, how about you?

HAP

I got my washin'.

[*Holds up a suit of B.V.D's. Then dips it back in the tub.* LOU *laughs.*

LOU

I'd rather go dirty than wash in this weather. I'm freezing.

MAW (*gathering up cards*)

Well, Lou, then I guess we gotta call it a day.

LOU

Anyhow, I took him for $4.45. That'll buy me my grub the rest of the week. And, believe me, it'll come in handy.

MAW

Notice where the Colonel's got me spotted this week? Next to the Shooting Gallery. Swell place for a Mitt Camp trying to tell a sucker's past, present, and future with them rifles banging in my ears! I ain't took in ten berries so far.

SAILOR (*hovering over oil stove*)

What you expect when th' weather's like this? Ef I didn't know I was in Illinois I'd think I wuz at the North Pole.

HAP

Th' lady down where I'm roomin' sez th' frost got all her fruit trees an' vege*tables* last night.

LOU (*sighing*)

Well, if it ain't one thing it's another. One week, it's rain; next, the police slough the joints fer griftin'; an' next it's so cold you gotta stay in bed to keep warm. I got *my* belly full of this kind of life.

[*She crosses to the cot and flops down disconsolately.*

MAW

It's the same all over. I had a letter this mornin' from Rubberneck Joe Kramer, a little talker down at the Island. He sez Coney's starvin' to death.

SAILOR

It ain't th' *weather* thet's ruined this here business. (*Importantly.*) You wanta know what's done it?

MAW (*irritably*)

We know, we know—autos, radio and the pitchers. But I'll tell you what's *really* killin' the outdoor show game—they ain't no brains behind it.

HAP (*scrubbing a sock*)

Maw's *right*. You gotta give 'em novelty to keep 'em comin'.

MAW (*going to oil stove*)

Get over, Sailor. . . . Well, I know one thing. I ain't goin' out another season. I gotta little put away, an' I'm goin' to Florida and buy me a shack, and take life easy. I been livin' outa a trunk long enough. And take it from me, Lou, you get out while you're still young—and got your sex appeal. Look at Carrie, what it's done to her.

LOU

Carrie'd be all right if Nifty didn't treat her like a dog. He makes me sick! The worst boozer on the show till he got this papa craze. And the last ten days since the kid's been here, you'd think he was Billy Sunday or somethin'. I heard him givin' Carrie hell the other day for swearin' in front of the kid. "Be yourself!" I sez to him! "Be yourself!"

MAW

Wonder how come Nifty wants to make him into a lawyer?

SAILOR

I reckon he figures he'd like t' have somebody in th' family t' get him outa jail.

[*They all laugh heartily.* MAW *slaps her leg. A twinge of rheumatism hits her.*

MAW

My rheumatism's givin' me fits. Well, I'm goin' down to my joint and get some buckeye salve on this leg.

HAP

Heat's better'n salve. Go over t' th' cookhouse an' stick it in th' oven.

MAW (*crossing to exit*)

Last time I done that Whitey kicked. Said I held him up with his supper. (MAW *starts out, rear, limping.* CARRIE *appears in the entrance, looking worried and preoccupied.* CARRIE *walks down and sits on crate.*) Carrie, where *you* been all afternoon?

CARRIE

I went up town to the movies.

MAW

You musta been hard up for somethin' to do.

LOU

You go by yourself, Carrie?

CARRIE (*crossly*)

I'm of age, ain't I?

MAW

You ain't got a crush on one of them screen sheiks! (CARRIE *doesn't reply.*) Well, I guess you're safe with any man that's embalmed in celluloid. Gawd, I feel like the Iron Horse!

[MAW BENSON *goes out.*

LOU (*to* CARRIE)

What pitcher'd you see?

CARRIE

I dunno. I just went for some place to get warm.

SAILOR (*grinning*)

They say th' jails is heated in these parts. Ef it gets much colder, mebbe I'll try that.

CARRIE

Hap, where's Nifty?

[HAP *has improvised a clothes line by stretching a cord to two of the side poles. He is now hanging up his washing which consists of a B.V.D., a shirt and a pair of socks.*

HAP

I ain't saw him, Carrie, sence jest after you left.

CARRIE

Is that nipple o' his with him?

LOU

God, that's a foolish question!

SAILOR

I seen 'em leave th' lot together—didn't say where they wuz headed fer. All dressed up—both o' them.

LOU (*laughing*)

Maybe Nifty's takin' him to get him baptized . . .

SAILOR (*sympathetically*)

Didn't Nifty ask you t' go with 'em, Carrie?

CARRIE (*hysterically*)

Oh, no—he didn't want *me* along! I ain't good enough for their society. The little tin-Jesus ain't took a fancy to me!

HAP

Now you're all wrong there, Carrie. Chris jest don't know how t' take you yet. You could make him like you ef you——

CARRIE

What you want me to do? Lay down and let him *walk* on me! He ain't the Prince o' Wales.

LOU

No, nor nothin' like. . . . Carrie, don't you take a thing off o' them two.

CARRIE (*disgustedly*)

Oh, what's the use talkin' . . . ! (*Rising.*) Anybody want a drink? I gotta quarta white mule in my trunk I been savin' for just such a lousy day as this.

SAILOR (*elaborately*)

Ef yer talking to *me*, I could stand a swaller.

CARRIE

How about you, Lou?

LOU

Sure!

CARRIE (*taking key from hand bag*)

Well, here, Sailor, open my trunk and you'll find it in the top drawer. Wrapped up in a pair o' purple bloomers.

SAILOR (*taking key*)

Ef it's liquor, leave it to me!

HAP

An' don't sample none o' it neither!

[SAILOR *goes to trunk up right.*

[CHRIS *comes in at entrance, rear. He is much improved in appearance. He wears a neat blue suit, and a straw hat. He has acquired a suggestion of his father's swagger, but he is still ingenuous and full of boyish enthusiasm.*

CHRIS

Hello, folks! Do you know it's warmin' up outside? The Colonel sez he looks for a *big crowd* tonight.

LOU (*derisively*)

Now *I'll* tell one, Pollyanna!

CHRIS

Sure! It's pay-night at the mills. There'll be more folks out here than you can shake a stick at.

HAP

What you and yer Paw been up t' all afternoon, Chris?

CHRIS (*sitting in chair left of crate*)

I don't know's I ought to tell you. Seems kinda foolish.

LOU

Come on, big boy, we won't give you away.

CHRIS

Well, I had Paw get all dressed up, an' I did the same. And we went up town— (*Embarrassedly.*) you're going to laugh at us——

HAP

No—go ahead.

CHRIS

Well we went to one of these photographer's galleries, an' got our pictures made!

[HAP *and* LOU *look at him in amazement.* CARRIE *mutters under her breath.*

LOU

Is *that* all you got to do with yourself?

CHRIS

Shucks, I don't want 'em fer myself. . . . I kinda thought Aunt Ella and gran'pa back home would like a picture of us—taken together.

HAP

How'd you ever talk Nifty into getting his pitcher took?

CHRIS

He put up a kick at first, but he come round. He hasn't had his made before since he married Maw. (*Grinning.*) They got one at home in the album; he's wearin' a swaller-tail and a stove-pipe hat.

LOU (*shaking her head*)

I'll bet he looked like the undertaker.

[SAILOR WEST *hands a bottle and a cup to* CARRIE. ALL *watch bottle eagerly.*

CARRIE

Who's first? Here, Lou.

LOU (*taking cup*)

If you insist. . . . Well, here's mud in your eye! (*She drinks it down and shudders.*) Jese that'd make you run upstairs and rob your own trunk!

HAP

Jest what I need to warm me up.

[LOU *returns the cup to* CARRIE.

CARRIE (*pouring*)

How much you want, Hap?

HAP

Ladies before gents. Drink that yerself, an' gimme th' bottle.

CARRIE (*handing* HAP *the tumbler*)

Not on your life!

CHRIS (*who has been watching intently*)

Is that the—real stuff?

CARRIE

Naw, it's sasperilla soda-pop. Have a taste?

HAP (*aside to* CARRIE)

Nix, Carrie . . .

CHRIS

I don't mind if I do.

LOU

To drink that stuff, kid, you gotta either have a sweetheart or a moustache!

HAP (*drinking*)

You don't want any, Chris,—it's th' old red eye.
[*He drinks, coughs and splutters. Then sinks on box down right mopping his brow.*

CHRIS

Red eye? You mean—whiskey, Hap?

HAP (*making a wry face*)

It's the best you c'n git off a bootlegger.
[CARRIE *pours another glassful.*

SAILOR (*mouth watering*)

Ain't thet one mine, Carrie?
[CARRIE *hands it to* SAILOR, *who tosses it off in the gulp and smiles broadly.*

LOU

One more o' them and I'd be lit up like Luna Park!

CHRIS (*diffidently*)

I think I'd like to try a little.

CARRIE

Ever had any before?

CHRIS

I drank a glass o' beer once up in South Bend.

LOU (*mockingly*)

You little old devil, you!

CHRIS

It tasted bitter but I liked it. Will you let me have a little, Carrie?

CARRIE

What do you want it for?

CHRIS

I just want to see what it's like.

CARRIE

If you'll keep your mouth shut.

CHRIS

I'm not goin' to say anything.

HAP

Better leave it be, Chris. . . . You ain't needin' it.

CARRIE

Aw, dry up, Hap, you old woman! (*Pouring.*) He's old enough to know what he wants.

HAP

All right—all right.

[*Exits.*

CHRIS (*taking cup*)

Well, here's—(*Sheepishly*) What was it you said, Lou? Oh, yeh—here's mud in your eye!

[*He gulps down the liquor; in spite of his efforts to be "manly," he coughs violently.* CARRIE *and* LOU *laugh uproariously at his discomfiture. As* CHRIS *is recovering,* NIFTY *appears in the main entrance. He watches them unnoticed for a moment.*

NIFTY

What's goin' on here?

CARRIE (*whispering to* CHRIS)

Hide it, you little fool!

[CHRIS *puts the cup behind his back, as* CARRIE *hides the bottle.*

NIFTY (*coming up to* CHRIS)

What's eatin' on you, Chris?

CHRIS (*smiling fatuously and then coughing*)

Nothin', I got somethin' the wrong way down my wind-pipe, I reckon.

[*Coughs again.*

NIFTY

You sound like you swallered a pack o' fire-crackers. What's behind your back?

CHRIS

Nothin'—well—just an empty cup. I been drinkin' sasperilla.

[NIFTY *suspiciously eyes* CHRIS. *Then looks at the others, who turn away. He takes cup from* CHRIS, *smells it, looks from one to the other. When he speaks it is calmly but with the utmost contempt.*

NIFTY

You're a swell bunch o' lice!

[*He savagely throws the cup against the center pole.*

LOU (*brazenly*)

Gee, he's gettin' dramatic on us!

NIFTY

Where'd you get it, Chris?

[CHRIS *remains silent. There is a tense pause.*

CARRIE

I give it to him, that's where! He asked for it.

[NIFTY *looks at* CHRIS.

NIFTY

How much did you have?

CARRIE

He ain't had enough to wet the bottom o' the cup. Who do you think you are—a prohibition agent?

NIFTY

I'll show you who I am! (*Pushing* CHRIS *roughly toward* SAILOR.) Here, Sailor, take him over t' the cookhouse an' make him drink a cup a black coffee!

CHRIS

Aw, Paw. . . .

CARRIE

That's a laugh! You must think he's stewed. An' on a thimbleful.

NIFTY (*to* SAILOR)

Didja hear me, Sailor?

LOU

For God's sake, Nifty, where's your sense of humor?

CHRIS

I didn't have enough to harm a fly. . . .

NIFTY (*to* SAILOR)

You goin' to do what I say?

SAILOR

Sure! But yer makin' a boob out o' yerself, Nifty.

NIFTY

Let me be the judge o' that.

SAILOR

Come on, kid.

CHRIS (*to* NIFTY)

It wasn't Carrie's fault—I kept after her till she give it to me.

[SAILOR *takes* CHRIS *by the arm, and they go out main entrance.*

NIFTY (*turning on her*)

Now, Lou, see how long it'll take you to beat it.

LOU (*indignantly*)

You askin' me to leave!

NIFTY

You ain't deaf!

CARRIE

I got somethin' to say about that. Lou come here to see me.

NIFTY

She's goin' to beat it, an' what's more she's goin' to stay away. Get a move on, Lou!

CARRIE (*rising*)

Say, how do you get that way! You set still, Lou. If Lou wants to come an' see me, I'd like to see you stop her!

LOU (*rising*)

Come on, Carrie, we'll go over to my dump.

NIFTY (*to* LOU)

Carrie's goin' to stay here!

CARRIE (*angrily*)

Say, big boy, you're goin' a little bit too far! I'll show you if I am!

[CARRIE *starts to follow* LOU, *but as she passes* NIFTY, *he grabs her roughly by the arm.*

NIFTY

Set down, Carrie!

CARRIE (*struggling*)

You big gorilla!

NIFTY

I said *set down!*

[CARRIE *gives up struggling and sinks in a camp chair by stove.*

LOU

All I can say is, Carrie, you're a damn fool to put up with him. My Gawd!

[LOU *exits through flap upper left.*

CARRIE (*rubbing her arm*)

Now you got me all bruised up again. . . .

NIFTY

Well, when I say somethin', pay attention. I want you to stay because you an' me got somethin' to say to each other.

CARRIE

If you mean about that drink, Nifty, the kid begged for it. You heard him say so himself.

NIFTY

You didn't have to give it to him. You done it for meanness, you know you did!

CARRIE

We was all drinkin', an' he—say, he's not in diapers, even if you do treat him like it!

NIFTY

I ain't goin' to have him drinkin'. Not if I have to break his neck.

CARRIE (*sneering*)

An' you the biggest boozer in the show!

NIFTY

That don't make it right for him. It's my job to see he keeps clean. What the hell kinda father would I be not to steer him off stuff that'll put him on the bum?

CARRIE (*laughing*)

You're a swell example for anyone!

NIFTY

I ain't touched a drop since he come on the show.

CARRIE

That's what's the matter with you! You gone sour. You oughta get a tambourine an' join the Salvation Army.

NIFTY (*sitting dejectedly on box at center*)

Listen, Carrie, all this talk ain't doin' no good. (*Hesitantly.*) I been thinkin' things over, an' I decided the only thing to do is lay our cards on the table. You an' me've been pallin' together for some time, an' you're a good old wagon, but it comes down to this: we're through . . .

[CARRIE *stares at him a moment, aghast.*

CARRIE

Through!

NIFTY

Understand, this ain't somethin' I'm doin' on the spur o' the moment. But now that there's other things to consider . . . Well, we gotta call it a day, that's all.

CARRIE

Say, you outa your head?

NIFTY

Don't get me wrong. I ain't goin' to ditch you as far as the show's concerned. You're a swell little dancer, Carrie, an' you can have yer job as long as I'm with the outfit. All I mean is—the you an' me part o' it.

CARRIE

You can't mean you're gonna quit me. Don't you think I got some feelings?

NIFTY

Well, it's come down to cases, and——

CARRIE (*wrathfully*)

Why, you dirty two-timer, you can't get away with that with me—I'll get the law——!

NIFTY

Now, listen, you might as well calm down, Carrie. You ain't got no claim on me.

CARRIE

I haven't——

NIFTY

No. Livin' together like man and wife don't make us man and wife.

CARRIE

You don't love me any more.

NIFTY

I didn't say that. But I gotta think of Chris——

CARRIE

Chris! You're scared the little darlin'll find out his old man ain't God Almighty——!

NIFTY

Now, look here, Carrie, I ain't tryin' to pose as no saint, but it ain't fair to him—me livin' like this—with the kid here and all. How's he gonna have any respect for me, if I——

CARRIE

You make me sick! All of a sudden you start squawkin' because you think I ain't good enough to associate with that brat. The big mistake I made was to take up with you without first having the papers on you (*she paces up and down. Almost beside herself with rage*), but I'll show you— You can't throw me off like an old shoe—I'll show you!

NIFTY (*rises and crosses down left. Then irritably*)

Aw, pipe down, Carrie, pipe down.

CARRIE (*almost screaming*)

I won't shut up—I won't shut up—I won't! Oh, God, what was I doing to fall in love with a devil—

that's what you are—a devil! (*Her voice breaks and she sobs.*) You ain't got a heart in your body.
[*She sinks on the ground by the chair.*

NIFTY (*quietly*)

Carrie, I don't like this any better than you do, but it had to come sooner or later—an' now it's over with. You'll feel different when you get over that cryin' spell. . . . (*Pause*) Well, there's nothin' more to say.
[*He crosses to main entrance, and as his steps are heard on the step,* CARRIE *sobs violently. He turns as if to say something, hesitates and then exits.* CARRIE *is sobbing audibly, and* LOU'S *voice is heard off stage.*

LOU

Carrie, Carrie—I forgot my hat. (*Then* LOU *enters. Seeing* CARRIE *on her knees, she crosses to her.*) What's come over you, Carrie? Come on, get up. Is it something Nifty done?

CARRIE (*brokenly*)

He's quit me, Lou.

LOU

I thought he had somethin' like that up his sleeve. But don't mind him. He's just tryin' to throw a scare into you because you gave liquor to the kid.

CARRIE

He's quit me I tell ya, for *good*—I know him. What am I gonna do? He's all I got.

LOU

Aw, pull yourself together, honey. If he's left you, you're better off without him. There ain't a guy livin' worth cryin' over—I oughta know.

HAP (*enters center and comes down to* LOU *and* CARRIE. *Obviously agitatedly*)

What the hell's happened between you and Nifty, Carrie? I just heard him tellin' the Colonel that you and him had split.

LOU

They had a bust-up over the drink she give Chris.

HAP

I told you not to, Carrie, I told you.

LOU

Aw, shut up, Hap, ain't ya got a heart?

CARRIE

I ain't done nothin' to have him treat me this way. You'd think I was dirt under his feet—I was too easy on him—that's the trouble—too easy——

HAP

Aw, Carrie, Nifty's hot-tempered but he gets over it quick.

CARRIE

I'll show him if he can treat me like a dog. Nifty Miller won't forget the day he met up with me. I'll put a *bullet* in him if I go to the chair for it! So help me God, I will!

[CARRIE *rushes to trunk and takes revolver from top drawer.* LOU *rushes up to her, followed by* HAP.

LOU

Carrie, you've gone crazy.

CARRIE (*brandishing gun in right hand*)

I'll show you if I have! I'm just gettin' some sense.

LOU (*screaming and taking* CARRIE'S *right hand*)

Hap, get that rod away from her!

[CARRIE *swings right.* HAP *grabs* CARRIE'S *right arm and the three of them do a complete turn. In the struggle, the revolver is accidentally discharged, the bullet going into the ground. The shot seems to bring* CARRIE *to her senses, for she allows* HAP *to take the weapon from her. She sinks weakly on a stool.*

HAP (*panting and trembling with fright, examines himself to see if he has been shot*)

Jese, Carrie, you damn near shot me!

LOU

Hap, you beat it—quick! If anybody heard that shot there'll be trouble.

HAP (*he crosses to* CARRIE, *holding the revolver in his trembling hand*)

Now cut out this monkey business, an' do what Lou sez, y'hear?

LOU

Get out—I can handle her.

HAP (*shaking like a leaf*)

Jese, I'm nervous as a damn wild-cat!

[HAP *leaves the tent.*

LOU (*crosses to* CARRIE)

Now Carrie, you fasten your dress, an' let's get outa here. Here's your hat. You got yourself nearly cuckoo worryin' about Nifty. All you need to put you on your feet is a good night's sleep.

CARRIE (*staring in front of her*)

Sleep! You think I could sleep?

LOU

We'll stop by a drug-store an' get you somethin' . . . (CARRIE *makes no move.*) Come on . . .!

CARRIE (*after a pause*)

There's only one thing for me to do, Lou—that's quit the show.

LOU

What you talkin' about! Quit! Say, I'd see Nifty in hell before I'd let him drive *me* away. You're makin' good money, ain't you? You'd be a sap to leave. The way to get back at *that* one is to *stick*.

CARRIE

I can't stand havin' all the gang laughin' at me behind my back. . . .

LOU

Who's goin' to laugh at you?

CARRIE

Oh, I can hear 'em: "Nifty's give Carrie the air since his kid's come on the show, an' she don't know enough to clear out!"

LOU

I'd like to hear anybody pull that!

CARRIE

You can't stop 'em.

LOU

If you feel that way, instead of givin' up, do somethin' to turn the laugh on Nifty.

CARRIE

The only way I could get back at him would be doin' somethin' to that kid of his. He's the only thing Nifty cares about. If anything'd happen to that young fuzzface he'd get a taste, then, of his own medicine . . . (*Fervently.*) God, wouldn't I like to see that brat killed or somethin' just so's I could watch Nifty sufferin'! To make him see how it feels when you lose someone you love. . . .

[*There is a pause.*

LOU (*jokingly*)

You might let me vamp the kid. I could make him forget his happy home.

CARRIE (*struck by the idea*)

Lou, would you do that, would you?

LOU

Do what?

CARRIE

Help me get the *kid* away from Nifty. . . . (*Excitedly*) Lou, let's frame it so's he falls for you.

LOU (*surprised*)

I was only kiddin'.

CARRIE

I know, but you can do it! Make him fall for you. He's green as grass an' ain't never been up against a real sharpshooter and he'll be easy. He's got too much of his old man in him to ever be able to pass up a good-looker like you. Them eyes of yours would draw ducks off a pond.

LOU

Well, I ain't no cradle robber.

CARRIE

He's goin' on twenty. How old do you think you are?

LOU

I'm a hundred an' twenty if you figure my experience. No, Carrie, you got a bum hunch. My playin' around with the kid wouldn't help you any.

CARRIE

Yes, it would—don't you see? There's one thing Nifty won't stand for. Told me himself, if he ever caught the kid mixed up with a woman he'd kick him off the show.

LOU

Yeh, an' where do I get off if Nifty ketches me? He'd knock me for a ghoul.

CARRIE

We won't let him ketch you—I'll take care of that. (*Pause.* LOU *shakes her head negatively and* CARRIE *continues.*) Listen, Lou, you're fed up with this turkey outfit, ain't you? You said so yourself time

an' again. An' if you had the stake, you'd blow tomorrow, wouldn't you?

LOU

I sure would.

CARRIE (*craftily*)

I'll tell you what I'll do, Lou. If you'll get this kid—hook, line an' sinker—give him the works—I'll make you a present of a C for your trouble.

LOU

You'll give me——!

CARRIE

A hundred bucks, cash.

LOU

You're kiddin' me. . . .

CARRIE

I'll show you if I'm kiddin'. (*She crosses to dressing-table and gets purse. Takes money out of purse.*) I'll give you twenty-five right now . . . An' the rest when you get him. By the time Nifty's on to it, you've blown to another show, an' his kid is on the road to bein' a chaser same's his old man.

[LOU *starts to take money, then turns away.*

LOU

But it's a dirty trick to play on papa's boy.

CARRIE

Whadya mean dirty? He's just ripe for some jane to pick. How much longer you think it'll be before he gets hep to himself?

LOU

How'd I ever get him alone? Nifty watches him like a hawk.

CARRIE

I'll fix that end o' it. . . . (*Offering money temptingly.*) Well, what you say, Lou? A little business deal just between ourselves . . .

[CARRIE *puts money temptingly on the crate.*

[LOU *is about to reply, when* CHRIS's *voice is heard outside, saying "Carrie."* CARRIE *and* LOU *start guiltily.*

LOU

My God!

CARRIE

Think he heard us?

LOU (*whispering*)

If he's been standin' there, he couldn't help it.

CHRIS (*off stage*)

Can I come in a minute?

CARRIE (*calling to* CHRIS)

Wait a second—till I get my clothes on. (*Whispering to* LOU.) We'll soon find out . . . Well, Lou—— (LOU *hesitates, then picks up the money and hastily puts it in her pocket.*) All right, Chris, I guess you can come in now.

[CHRIS *enters. He is embarrassed at seeing* LOU.

CHRIS

I kinda thought I heard talkin' in here.

CARRIE

Yeh—? (*Pause.*) Set down, Chris.

CHRIS (*hesitantly*)

I just came in to tell you I feel purty bad about just what happened in here, Carrie.

CARRIE (*feigning sweetness*)

Oh, that's all right, Chris. I don't blame you none.

CHRIS

I didn't see any harm in it—you were all drinkin' . . . (*Grinning.*) Paw sure gave *me* a lecturin'.

[LOU *is studying* CHRIS *carefully. From now on until the end of the scene, she is very coquettish and ingenue.*

CARRIE

Now, Chris, don't you think nothin' more about it. I'd oughta known better. But it's all over now. Forget it!

CHRIS

An' you're not sore at me?

CARRIE

'Course not. No hard feelin' . . . Just to show you —shake!

[CARRIE *puts out her hand, which* CHRIS *takes.* CARRIE *then looks at* LOU, *as if to say "Well."*

LOU (*coaxingly, sitting on cot*)

Oh, Chris! Where you keep yourself all the time?

CHRIS

Well, when I'm not workin' around the show I'm usually somewheres with Paw.

LOU

I guess you ain't got time for girls, have you?

CHRIS (*good-naturedly*)

They don't seem to have time for me.

CARRIE

Say, a good-lookin' young fella like you could get any frill you wanted. Couldn't he, Lou?

LOU

I'll say!

CARRIE

Lou, here, wuz tellin' me only today how she'd like to get better acquainted. (*Playfully.*) If you ask me, I think she's kinda gone on you, Chris.

LOU (*feigning bashfulness*)

Carrie . . . hush up!

[CHRIS *hides his embarrassment by putting on a bold front.*

CHRIS

Well, it suits me . . .

[LOU *coughs and motions* CARRIE *to leave.* CARRIE *takes the hint.*

CARRIE

Well, you two kids 'll have to excuse me. (*Importantly.*) I gotta go over to the office-wagon to see

the Colonel about somethin' . . . (*Leering at them.*) Anyhow, two's company an' three's a crowd. I can see that all right. I guess you won't miss me. So long.

LOU

So long.

CARRIE (*standing by center entrance—significantly*)
Don't do anything I wouldn't do . . . !
[*She exits.*

LOU

We won't, will we, Chris? (CHRIS *walks in an embarrassed manner toward the right.* LOU *smiles at him.*) Come over here and set, Chris. Come on, take the weight off your feet. (CHRIS *grins shyly, then in a diffident manner, walks and sits on the cot near* LOU. *He's quite ill-at-ease.* LOU *moves so that* CHRIS *has to sit very close to her.*) So you and Nifty had your pitchers took this afternoon, did you? Goin' to give me one when it's finished?

CHRIS (*flattered*)

If you like. Though I don't look for them to be any good.

LOU

How was you posed?

CHRIS

We were standin' up—Paw had his arm sorta around my shoulder-like.

LOU (*playfully*)

Somethin' like this?

[LOU *puts her arm around him.* CHRIS *is surprised; he laughs nervously.*

CHRIS

Aw shucks . . . !

LOU

Say, Chris, do you think you could get to likin' me?

CHRIS

I don't see why not.

LOU (*lowering her voice*)

How are you on keepin' things to yourself?

CHRIS (*in a puzzled tone*)

What?

LOU

I mean, you don't go tellin' Nifty everything that goes on, do you?

CHRIS

'Course not.

LOU

Would you run and tell him if I was to kiss you?

CHRIS (*with an embarrassed laugh*)

Say—what do you think I am?

LOU

I bet you musta had a lot o' sweethearts when you was home, Chris.

CHRIS

I never had much use for country girls. They don't know anything.

LOU (*edging closer*)

Didn't you have a special one you'd take out buggy-ridin' on dark nights sometimes?

CHRIS (*not caring to deny it*)

Well . . .

LOU (*laughing*)

I thought so. . . . An' did you used to kiss an' hug her? (CHRIS *doesn't answer.* CHRIS *appears rather shy. Her face close to his.*) Show me how you used to kiss her. . . . You can shut your eyes an' pretend I'm her. (CHRIS *is about to kiss* LOU *when he loses courage.*) What's the matter? Scared? (*She kisses him. Impulsively he takes her in his arms and kisses her.*)

Curtain.

ACT TWO

Scene I

The same. In an effort to alleviate the terrific effect of the summer heat, two sections of the canvas side walls have been roped up. Through these openings can be seen the walls of other tents close by, in the brilliant sunshine.

Time: One week later, Morning. Rantoul, Ill.

At Rise: CARRIE *is seated on a stool, center, her hair down, smoking a cigarette and fanning herself with a frayed palm-leaf fan.* MAW BENSON *is bending over her, comb and brush in hand, "touching up"* CARRIE'S *hair. A bottle of dye is on the blue box beside her.* DOC *rises, sits on the ground a short distance away poring over the latest issue of* THE BILLBOARD. *At back,* POP MORGAN *lies asleep on a pile of canvas, with his pitchman's satchel for a pillow.*

MAW (*mopping her face*)

Gee, these here tents are like a turkish bath! Just feel of me, Carrie—I'm hotter'n a June bride—I'll bet I sweat a *quart,* an' the day ain't half over!

CARRIE

An' to think a week ago we was beefin' about the cold.

[MAW *resumes her work.*

DOC (*after reading a moment*)

Here's your chance, Maw. (*Reading.*) "Wanted for Freak-Tent: Fire-eater, tattooer, glass blowers, midgets, fat girl; get this, *also* A-1 palmist who carries her own mitt camp. Join on wire. Will pay half your fare."

MAW

I'm satisfied where I'm at. . . . (*After a moment.*) Doc, see what's in "Midway Confab." It's like a letter from home to read that. (*To* CARRIE.) Two seasons ago when I was on the Blotner Show up in Alberta and Calgary I liked to died of homesickness every week till *The Billboard* come.

[DOC *bursts out laughing. The others look at him quizzically.*

DOC

Listen to this, would you! (*Reading.*) "Nifty Miller, the leather-lunged spieler an' manager of the popular Hawaiian outfit with Gowdy's Big City Shows—this week Cambridge City, Illinois—has initiated his son, Chris, into the racket. Nifty writes that his husky young offspring is taking to the profession like a duck to water, but that he's going to send him back to school in the fall and make a lawyer of him."

CARRIE (*under her breath*)

Some lawyer . . .

MAW (*amused*)

Who'd ever thought Nifty'd write in? Won't I give him the *razzberry* when I see him!

DOC

Hap was tellin' me the kid's losin' some o' that pep he had when he first joined on.

MAW

The novelty's wore off, that's all.

DOC

You wouldn't ketch me lettin' a kid o' mine take up troupin'. It'll make a bum outa the best o' them.

MAW

Say, if they're goin' to be a bum—all hell can't stop 'em.

DOC

Boz-woz! This ain't no life for a kid.

MAW

Boloney! It's all in how their folks raise 'em. If I had a kid an' he wanted to troupe, I wouldn't stand in his way. If Chris has got the right stuff in him he'll come through.

CARRIE

What'll you bet he does?

[HAP *comes in rear entrance, carrying three bottles of coca-cola.*

DOC (*turning*)

Gimme one of them bottles o' coke quick, Hap. Holy mackerel, I'm dry!

HAP (*giving each a bottle*)

The thermometer over t' th' juice joint sez 94 in the shade.

MAW

You don't have to tell me how hot it is! I'd like to get in a bathtub full o' cracked ice and set there all day. (*Indicating bottle.*) Where's yours, Hap?

HAP

I drunk mine over there. (*Handing her a coin.*) Here's yer change, Maw.

[*The three drink long draughts from the bottles.*

MAW

Baby! That hits me right where I live!

HAP

Sailor West's 'round takin' up a purse for Ruby Gordon. He been over here yet?

DOC

We ain't seen him.

MAW

Wouldn't you think Ruby would have saved enough to bury Spike with? Spike made his sixty smackers a week regular.

DOC

Yeh, an' blew it in as fast as he made it. He was a fool when it come to Ruby. Paid over a hunderd bucks alone for that gray squirrel she wuz wearin' this spring. You know, dough don't last long at *that* rate.

MAW (*sentimentally*)

It was a pleasure to see 'em together. Married five years an' still liked each other. It'll sure go hard with Ruby without Spike.

CARRIE

Where'd the hospital ship the body to?

HAP

Ruby took him to his folks out in Keokuk. That's what the telegram sed that come t' th' Colonel last night.

MAW

Well, if I was the Colonel, I'd feel like kickin' off myself. Spike would be alive now if the old man hadn't made him go in the tank back there in Cambridge City. He *murdered* Spike the same as if he'd shot him down with a gun.

[NIFTY *enters, rear, obviously in a bad humor.*

DOC

Nifty, didja see you got your name in *The Billboard* this week?

MAW

Give him a thrill—read it out to him, Doc.

NIFTY

I seen it.

MAW (*teasingly*)

Since when did you start writin' for the newspapers? You'll be givin' 'em the story of your life next!

[DOC *shows the item to* HAP.

NIFTY (*to* MAW)

What the hell's it any of your business!

MAW

Aw, can'tcha take a little kiddin'?

CARRIE (*spitefully*)

Naw! Nifty wants to do all the kiddin' himself.

NIFTY

I ain't in the mood for kiddin', that's all. . . .

DOC

Heat got you?

NIFTY

Any o' you seen Chris this mornin' yet?

MAW

He ain't been 'round here.

NIFTY (*grumbling*)

I left the room two hours ago, an' he said he was gettin' right up.

MAW

When they're young they gotta have their sleep out.

NIFTY

All he wants to do lately is sleep. He's gettin' as bad as Pop over there. (*Nods in the direction of* POP MORGAN.) I told him I wanted him to build them new jacks today for the front. . . . We can't wait no longer. Hap, I guess you'll have to do it.

HAP

I got the pieces ready. It won't be no job.

NIFTY

Well, get at it.

HAP (*turning to go*)

I reckon I'll fetch the lumber in here, outa th' sun. Got any objection, Boss?

[HAP *goes out rear.*

CARRIE (*rising*)

Come on, Maw, let's go over to Whitey's.

MAW (*rises, and crossing to main entrance*)

All right, dearie.

NIFTY (*as she is going out*)

Carrie, you know what Chris wuz doin' out so late last night?

CARRIE (*coldly*)

I ain't his nursemaid! How should I know?

NIFTY

I thought mebbe you seen him . . . needn't get so huffy!

CARRIE

Don't ask me nothin' about him! You told me, hands off.

[CARRIE *and* MAW BENSON *exit.*

DOC

Carrie's sure high-hattin' you these days, Nifty.

NIFTY

After the deal she got from me, I don't blame her none.

DOC

All I can say, you're a damn fool to let her stay on the show.

NIFTY

Long as she does her job, an' behaves herself, she can stay. She can't do me no harm . . .

DOC (*returning to his Billboard*)

Well, I guess you know your own business . . .
[HAP *re-enters, staggering under a load of new lumber, which he throws down, near the center. The noise awakes* POP MORGAN, *who rises and picks up his coat and satchel and exits through flap.*

HAP

I see Chris comin' now, Nifty. (HAP *goes to the blue box, raises the lid and takes out a hammer and a box of nails.*) Ef she jest cools off, an' ef she don't storm, we'll do good tonight.

DOC

Yeah? There's too damn many "ifs" in this here business to suit me.
[NIFTY *watches the entrance.* CHRIS *enters very hurriedly.*

CHRIS

I musta went back to sleep . . .

NIFTY (*sternly*)

I s'pose you don't know you're holdin' us up. I told you I wanted them jacks built.

CHRIS

We got plenty of time, I thought we could wait till it cooled off.

NIFTY (*angrily*)

Listen, when I give an order, I ain't talkin' to hear myself talk! The sooner you get that in your head the better.

HAP

Aw, gee, Boss, I jest recollect we ain't got no cross-cut saw. Ours wuz stole off us back in th' last burg.

NIFTY

Well, borrow one off the prop wagon. If you'd lock up your tools——

DOC (*to* HAP)

I gotta saw in my joint I'll get you.

[*Rising and stretching.*

CHRIS (*wanting to get away*)

I'll go fetch it, Hap.

NIFTY

No, you won't! You'll stay here. Hap, you go along with Doc.

HAP

Just as you say——

[DOC *and* HAP *go out rear entrance.* CHRIS *walks over to the lumber and pretends to be inspecting it, then he picks up a ruler.*

NIFTY

Come here, Chris, I wanta talk to you.

CHRIS (*turning reluctantly*)

I thought you wanted them jacks built.

NIFTY

They can wait. Set down. (CHRIS *sits on stool to the right of the crate.*) Now, it ain't my idea to be naggin' at you, but I ain't satisfied with the way you been actin' lately. I might as well tell you, if you wanta stay 'round here you gotta brace up an' take more interest in what's goin' on.

CHRIS

Well,—a feller's gotta have his sleep.

NIFTY

If you got to bed nights, you wouldn't be so groggy mornin's . . . where'd you go last night after we shut down here? I looked 'round for you.

CHRIS

I was nowheres in particular . . . I—I took a walk.

NIFTY

Took a walk! It musta been a long one.

CHRIS

It was a nice night, an'—an'—I——

NIFTY

Was you by yourself?

CHRIS

Sure! Why not?

NIFTY

Where'd you go after you walked? I waited up for you till God knows what time.

CHRIS

I stopped up town at a lunch car an' had a bowl of chili. . . . Say what you so nosey about?

NIFTY (*more gently*)

I don't mean to be nosey, Chris. Don't get me wrong. Only, I think I gotta right to keep track of you a little. (*Coming closer.*) You see, kid, I've made a good many mistakes in my life; I got myself in habits that I ain't any too proud of. Well, I figure it wouldn't be right to let you go, an' not put you wise to some o' the things——

CHRIS

Oh, I'm all right. . . .

NIFTY

I think you are, too. That's why I'm countin' on you. You an' me hit it off purty good, an' there's no reason that after you get to be a lawyer we can't settle down somewheres together. I ain't goin' to spend the rest o' my days on a lousy carnival. I got plans for us, Chris.

CHRIS (*gloomily*)

It'll be a long time before I get through them colleges.

NIFTY

It seems long now, but you'll see how quick the time passes. Just think how nice it'll be to have an office of your own, an' people comin' to you to get them outa trouble. An' more dough than you'll know what to do with.

CHRIS

Well. . . .

NIFTY

Come on, Chris, let's be pals. (*He puts his arm around his shoulder.*) What'd you say?

[HAP *re-enters with saw.*

HAP (*fanning himself*)

Whew! Jese, I bet you could fry an egg out there in th' midway.

NIFTY

I wisht you'd let up belly-achin' about the weather. It won't make you any cooler talkin' about it. . . .

HAP (*he crosses down and takes ruler from* CHRIS)

I seen Gyp Haines over t' th' Fun House. He sed ef you ain't got nothin' better t' do, Nifty, t' come over an' take a hand o' stud with 'em.

NIFTY

Mebbe I will, soon's I get you two started.

HAP (*airily*)

Never you mind about us! We'll git 'em built, eh, Chris?

CHRIS

Sure . . .

NIFTY

Well, see you do a good job. (NIFTY *goes up center and turns. To* CHRIS.) When you get fin-

ished, Chris, if you say so, you an' me'll go down to the crick and have us a swim. How about it?

[CHRIS *smiles and then a sober expression comes over his face.*

CHRIS

I'll see how I feel . . . (NIFTY *is about to say something more, then changes his mind, goes out rear.*) (CHRIS *trying to appear unconcerned.*) What'll I do first, Hap?

HAP

Saw off that corner where I got it marked . . . (*Pause.*) Your daddy is a queer one all right. He never can't stand seein' nobody not doin' nothin'. You'd think after all these years o' troupin' he'd let down a little. But not him! He's full o' wim an' wigor, as th' feller sez.

CHRIS (*he picks up board, starts to saw*)

Well, he don't need to be so strict on me, I ain't a two-year-old.

[LOU *comes in from left and hides in back of crate up left of center.* CARRIE *follows her.*

CARRIE (*calling to* HAP)

Hap, come here a minute. I want you for somethin'.

[CARRIE *disappears.* HAP *puts down his tools.*

HAP (*peevishly*)

That danged woman can't leave me be five minutes. . . . I don't mind doin' a favor for somebody onc't in a while. But you'd think I wuz her own private

slave! (HAP *rises and crosses to left exit. Off stage he says*) What do you want?
[LOU *rushes down to Chris.*

LOU

Hello. (CHRIS *embraces her.*) Sure there ain't no one around?

CHRIS

Gee, Lou, it's a long time since we've been together . . . !

LOU (*fondly*)

It wuz only last night, foolish . . . !

CHRIS

Seems like a year.

LOU (*breathlessly*)

Don't hold me so tight, honey—you'll smother me. (*Drawing away.*) Now, be a good boy . . . Where'd Nifty go to?

CHRIS

To play cards with Gyp Haines. He won't bother us.

LOU

I been waitin' out there with Carrie—watchin' till he went. I thought he'd never leave.

CHRIS

If I'd knowed you were there, there'd been no holdin' me . . .

LOU

Kiss me again, Chris.

CHRIS (*taking her in his arms again*)

Hap's liable to come in. But I don't care . . .

LOU

Carrie's got rid o' him for us. Sent him to the drug-store . . . I don't dare stay long though . . . somebody'll be comin' along. Will you meet me again tonight, Chris—the same place?

CHRIS

You bet. Paw gave me fits fer bein' out so late last night. I stalled him. Said I was takin' a walk.

LOU

He didn't swallow that!

CHRIS

Sure! He's got no reason to doubt me. No one's seen us together, exceptin' Carrie . . . Lou, I hate it—the way we gotta hide 'round behind folks' backs . . . You'd think we were crooks, or somethin'.

LOU

You know what Nifty'd do if he'd catch us . . .

CHRIS

He's got no claim to be like that. It's not fair. I'd like to tell him an' everyone else how crazy in love with you I am.

LOU

Now, Chris, be sensible!

CHRIS

I mean it! I'm so happy when I think about you, it's about all I can do to keep it to myself. (*Pause.*) Lou, how long's it goin' to be before we can—get married?

LOU (*catching her breath*)

Oh, you mustn't talk that way, Chris!

CHRIS (*pleadingly*)

Well, we can't go on this way very much longer. Lou, we can slip off an' get married, an' tell Paw afterwards. He'll not care when he hears how much —Lou, you love me, too, don't you? (LOU *impulsively throws her arms about* CHRIS. *She is almost in tears.*) Don't you, Lou? You said last night——

LOU

You know I do, Chris . . .!

CHRIS (*recklessly*)

Then, I don't care about anything else! Lou, listen, we *gotta* get married—after what we been to each other, it wouldn't be right *not* to.

LOU (*weeping*)

I ain't fit fer a nice clean kid like you—that's the truth, Chris!

CHRIS

You're wonderful! You're the only one in the world I give a hang about . . . Lou, what you cryin' fer?

LOU (*clinging to him*)

God, I'm miserable!

[CARRIE *appears at upper left entrance.*

CARRIE (*stands regarding them a moment*)

What's goin' on here? Looks like the big scene from "Camille."

CHRIS (*bewildered*)

I don't know—Lou started cryin' all of a sudden——

CARRIE (*coming down*)

Well, you two better break that clinch. Somebody's liable to walk in any minute——

[LOU *withdraws from* CHRIS's *embrace.*

CHRIS

Is it somethin' I said, sweetheart?

LOU (*wiping her eyes*)

No, I just got the heeby-jeebies—I'll get over it.

CARRIE.

Chris, go get her a bottle o' coke. If you ask me, she's crazy with the heat.

LOU

I don't want nothin'.

CARRIE

Sure, she does. Go on, Chris. Get her a cold bottle.

CHRIS

I won't be a minute.

[CHRIS *exits through rear center.* CARRIE *looks at* LOU *curiously.*

CARRIE

What's all the shootin' for?

LOU

I been makin' a fool outa myself, that's all.

CARRIE (*drily*)

You don't need to tell *me* that . . .

LOU (*with an effort*)

Carrie, Chris wants to marry me . . .

CARRIE (*laughing*)

Didn't I tell you it'd work? (*Laughing.*) Whenever I want any more vampin' done you're the chicken gets the job.

[CARRIE *continues to laugh.*

LOU (*all nerves*)

For God's sake, cut that out, Carrie!

CARRIE (*surprised at this outburst*)

What's come over you?

LOU (*pitifully*)

There's no use pretendin' any longer. He's got me—I'm crazy about him. (CARRIE *is too astounded to do anything but gasp.*) Oh I know I'm all kinds of a damn fool . . . but I can't help myself. He's got me goin' 'round like a top.

CARRIE

You know what you're sayin' . . . !

LOU

All I know is, we both got it the same. An' that I don't want to go on livin' without him. . . .

CARRIE

You mean you'd marry him!

LOU (*confused*)

I don't know . . . you gotta stand by me, Carrie. I never thought I could feel this way about anybody. . . . He's the sweetest kid God ever let live. The first one that ever treated me like anything but a common tart—maybe that's why . . . (*Hysterically.*) Can you beat it? Me? Fallin' in love like a school-girl! Hard-boiled Hannah, gettin' caught. Jese, it's funny . . . !

CARRIE

You ain't in love—you're just kiddin' yourself.

LOU

I wish I was! It's only goin' to mean a lot o' misery for both of us. (*Turning on* CARRIE *savagely.*) You got me into this, damn you! What am I goin' to do?

CARRIE (*firmly*)

The first thing you're goin' to do is get outa this tent before somebody comes along an' ketches you here. . . . God, you'd think a wise one like you'd have more sense than to get all messed up. . . . (*Looking towards the entrance.*) Hurry up, someone's comin'! (*Seeing* CHRIS *in the entrance.*) Oh, it's only Chris.

[CHRIS *comes down hurriedly, carrying a bottle of coca cola.*

CHRIS

Paw's right behind me. We better go somewheres else.

CARRIE

Beat it—both o' you—quick! I'll get rid o' him.

[CHRIS *takes* LOU *by the hand, and they hurry out upper left.* CARRIE *tries to compose herself, and a moment later* NIFTY *comes in rear.*

NIFTY (*looking around*)

Didn't I see Chris come in just now?

CARRIE

I told you I ain't keepin' tabs on him.

NIFTY (*looking at the lumber*)

What the hell's got into him? Not a lick done! Where's Hap?

CARRIE

I had him go for some headache medicine. Any objections?

[NIFTY *sits down moodily on stool right of crate.*

NIFTY (*after a moment*)

The Colonel sent me word over to Gyp Haines's to meet him here. Know what he wants?

CARRIE (*tartly*)

I ain't your private secretary!

NIFTY

I just asked you a civil question!

CARRIE

The less you say to me, the better I'll like it.

[COLONEL GOWDY *enters, rear. He is greatly perturbed.*

COLONEL (*coming down*)

Carrie, I must ask you to step out. I have something of a confidential nature to impart to Nifty.

CARRIE

Don't let me stop you—I was just leavin' anyway. Purty warm today, ain't it, Colonel? (*Receiving no response, she adds sarcastically*) Think it'll rain? [CARRIE *shrugs her shoulders and goes off, left.*

NIFTY

What's on your mind, Colonel?

COLONEL

Considerable—and of an unpleasant character. Do you know what that young squirt of yours has been up to, sir?

NIFTY

Chris?

COLONEL

He has the impudence and audacity to be carrying on an intrigue with Lou right under our very noses.

NIFTY (*aghast*)

What!

COLONEL

Now, don't misunderstand me, Nifty. I don't come to you to complain of the boy's having been the cause of the estrangement between Lou and myself. I bear your son no malice, the world is full of girls. Lou was nothing to me but the means of passing a pleasant hour. But as your friend and employer I feel

that it is my duty to tell you of this little affair that I have—more or less inadvertently—discovered, so that we may nip it in the bud.

[NIFTY *is swamped in the* COLONEL'S *oratorical flow.*

NIFTY

There ain't a word o' truth in it . . .!

COLONEL

Ah, my friend, in spite of your vigilance the lad has eaten of the Apple. And with a Jezebel who is not without her—her moments.

NIFTY

Why, it couldn't be possible . . . !

COLONEL

Are you with your son every minute? For instance, were you with him last night?

NIFTY (*reluctantly*)

Well . . . he took a walk . . .

COLONEL (*laughing*)

Ha, that's a new name for it! I'll tell you where he was last night, or at least *most* of the night. In the arms of his light o' love at her rooming-house, 420 Elm Street.

NIFTY

How do you know?

COLONEL

I've suspected all along that Lou's coldness to me was due to the presence of—shall we say—a new interest.

. . . Wishing to ascertain the correctness of the supposition, I engaged Nat Brody to do a little sleuthing for me. Last night Nat shadowed the lady in question, saw her stealthily enter the aforesaid house accompanied by your son. Nat waited in ambush. Shortly before four, the young Lothario emerged alone.

NIFTY (*weakly*)

What you think I oughta do, Colonel?

COLONEL

Do? There's but one thing to do. We must put an end to such flagrant disregard of the conventions. I expect you to give your son a severe reprimand for his unseemly conduct. And I shall dismiss Lou from my employ at once.

NIFTY (*rising savagely*)

It's lettin' her off too easy! She oughta be horsewhipped. A lousy tart like her takin' on a kid like Chris . . . ! Wait till I get hold o' her. . . . I'll make her sweat!

COLONEL

Now, Nifty, we can't blame it all on Lou. Boys will be boys. You and I know they all start sowing their wild oats sooner or later.

NIFTY

I can see now what's changed Chris this past week, the little simp . . . ! He'll try slippin' somethin'

over on me, will he! I've a damn good notion to ship him back to the farm!

[CHRIS *comes in from outside, L. in time to hear the last remark. He looks at his father apprehensively.*

COLONEL (*there is a moment's silence*)

Well, undoubtedly you two have much to say to each other. (*Turns to rear center entrance and stops by tent pole.*) Chris, my boy, I trust you will take what your father has to say in good spirit. We all like you here, but remember, for the good of the show we cannot tolerate immorality.

[*The* COLONEL *goes out, rear entrance.*

NIFTY

So you went out walkin' last night—you little liar. . . . If there's anything I hate it's a dirty liar. . . . If you had any sense you mighta knowed you two'd get caught.

CHRIS (*quietly*)

I suppose you've heard about me an' Lou—— (*With relief.*) Well, I'm glad of it.

NIFTY

I'll make you glad before I'm through.

CHRIS

I mean I hated to go on foolin' *you*, Paw.

NIFTY

For God's safe, Chris, what did you do it for? Why couldn't you be a square-shooter an' tell me she wuz makin' a play for you! I been through the mill; I coulda steered you right. (*Shaking his head.*)

The crummiest broad on the outfit, an' you have to get messed up with her!

CHRIS (*bristling*)

Don't you talk that way about Lou . . . ! I won't stand for it!

NIFTY (*furiously*)

Oh, you won't! Well, listen here, Purity, I gotta good notion to knock hell outa you, an' don't think I can't do it either.

[NIFTY *advances threateningly toward* CHRIS, *who stands his ground unflinchingly.*

CHRIS (*stubbornly*)

I don't care what you do to me, but you ain't goin' to say anything against her!

NIFTY (*stunned*)

God, you're gone completely off your head!

CHRIS (*softening*)

Paw, I don't wonder you don't understand, but Lou ain't like what she seems to you. She's wonderful an' good, an' why, sometimes she's shy an' bashful as——

NIFTY (*with extreme disgust*)

Aah!

CHRIS

Oh, I know she's no angel, but she's got a raw deal from most fellows. (*Jerkily.*) I understand her, an' well—Lou an' me are in love with one another.

NIFTY

Love! A nipple like you goes out an' sleeps with the first sexy little dame he meets up with an' then slobbers about love!

CHRIS (*turns away hurt*)

I thought you'd see——

NIFTY

See! I see I give you too much rope. I see you ain't got gumption enough to take care o' yourself! Took in by a jane that's not much more'n a common hustler.

CHRIS (*firmly*)

No matter what you say against her, I won't give Lou up.

NIFTY

No? Well, the Colonel an' me got a little somethin' to say about that. He's handed your wonderful girl her walkin' papers. She's fired! . . . Oh, I guess you'll give her up all right!

CHRIS (*thunderstruck*)

He's makin' her leave the show!

NIFTY

That's what your love did for her. Lost her her job.

CHRIS

You wouldn't do it—you couldn't! She hasn't done anything!

NIFTY

She's done plenty! An' her biggest mistake was throwin' the Colonel over for you. I don't s'pose she took the time to tell you she's been sleepin' with him, *too*, did she?

CHRIS (*frantically*)

You're a liar. You're a God damned liar!

[*Blind with rage,* NIFTY *strikes* CHRIS *full in the face, knocking him to the ground. There's a long pause. When the realization of what he has done comes to* NIFTY, *his shoulders sag and he mutters under his breath—"Oh, my God!"*

Slow Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene II

Scene II: The same.

Time: The next morning.

At Rise: CARRIE *is seated on a camp chair, R. C. mending a rip in the trunks of her costume.* SAILOR WEST *is sprawled out on the blue crate, smoking a cigarette and gossiping.*

SAILOR

Yeh? That's the way it goes. . . . Thet winter I wuz runnin' my tattoo parlor in th' Bowery, with most o' my customers gobs from th' Brooklyn Navy Yards. One snowy evenin' this here little Mamie come in, an' sez she wants some work done on her. I shows her th' designs, an' makes her a price—when come t' find out she didn't hev a dime. "I ain't in this business fer my health," I sez. "How 'bout me payin' you when I git my job?" she sez. Seems some showman'd promised her a season with his ten-in-one outfit if she'd git tattooed. Well, things wuz purty slack, an' afore I knowed it she'd talked me into turnin' her into a tattooed lady. Her skin took fine to the needle and in a week's time I had her a regular walkin' pitcher gallery. On her back I put a Flags o' all Nations, a piece that you couldn't git fer a double saw buck nowadays. On her chest

I done a Madonna an' angels. Both arms wuz covered with snakes an' Bleedin' Hearts. On her hips I had pitchers o' Admiral Dewey and Teddy Roosevelt. (*Chuckling.*) She was a sight fer sore eyes!

CARRIE (*looking up*)

Did you ever get your money outa her?

SAILOR

Did I! Mamie went out that season an' done me proud—wuz th' hit o' the midway. An' ever' week she worked she sends me an A.B.A. fer ten bucks. (*Sighs.*) I reckon she'd be payin' me yet, ef she hadn't been bumped off in a wreck on th' Santa Fe outa El Paso six years ago. . . . I gotta postcard o' her I'll show you sometime.

[LOU *comes in. She is greatly agitated. For a moment she stands in the doorway, lighting a cigarette.*

CARRIE (*to* LOU)

Sailor, here, has been spinnin' me yarns about what a great little guy he is.

LOU (*preoccupied*)

Yeah?

SAILOR

Kinda early for you t' be on th' lot, ain't it, Lou?

LOU

I got some business to talk over with Carrie.

SAILOR

In thet case, I'll be makin' myself scarce. (*Getting up.*) Say, Lou, I never got to see you yest'day. You

wanta kick in with a piece o' change fer Ruby Gordon? I'm collectin' fer Spike's funeral. Jest anything you feel like. I already got sixty-eight dollars to send her . . .

LOU (*opening handbag*)

You picked a swell one in me to put the bee on. I got a compac', a key to my room, a pack o' Camels, an' two bucks. Ruby's a good friend to me, too . . . well, here's the two bucks; you're more'n welcome to that.

SAILOR

Ef it leaves you short, mebbe you better not——

LOU

Take it, an' shut up. I'd as leave be broke as have that chicken feed.

SAILOR (*taking the money and putting it into an envelope*)

Well, much oblige. You couldn'a spent two bucks better. We never know when we'll be needin' help ourself.

LOU (*fervently*)

You said somethin' that time, brother . . . !

SAILOR

I'll put yer name down on th' list along with th' others. Yer a good sport, Lou.

[SAILOR WEST *goes out.* LOU *regards* CARRIE, *who is engrossed in her sewing, then quickly pulls a ring out of her bosom that is attached to a small chain which she is wearing around her neck.*

LOU

Look here, Carrie.

CARRIE

What you got?

[CARRIE *stares at the ring incredulously, then realizing its purport she looks blankly at* LOU.

LOU

Well, you want me to tell you what it is? It's a weddin' ring.

CARRIE (*dumbfounded*)

You an' the kid——!

LOU

We done it, Carrie. Not an hour ago. In a J. P.'s office down across from the courthouse.

CARRIE (*almost a whisper*)

Married . . . !

LOU

Chris wouldn't take no for an answer. I tried to put him off, but after him an' Nifty had that run-in yesterday—well—I ain't got a mind of my own where the kid's concerned, I'm so hipped on him. If he'd tell me to jump in front of an express train, I'd go do it. Honest to God, I didn't think there was a guy livin' could get me this way. (*Gazing at ring.*) Me, a missus! I swear, when that J. P. was talkin' I thought it was a dream.

CARRIE (*shaking her head*)

An' after all I said to you . . . !

LOU

Well, for the first time since I can remember I'm happy. *Real* happy. . . . I feel like laughin' an' cryin' all at once. Chris is the same way, too—we're like a coupla kids.

CARRIE

God, you got an awful wallop comin' when you wake up. But don't say I didn't warn you! I talked till I was black in the face. . . . I might as well saved my breath.

LOU

What Chris an' me do is our own business. We can take care of ourselves.

[CARRIE *laughs scornfully and lights cigarette.*

CARRIE

Where's the kid now?

LOU

Soon as it was over Chris beat it hell-bent over to the room to tell Nifty.

CARRIE (*sarcastically*)

That was a bright idea!

LOU

I tried to get him to wait, but he wouldn't listen to me. He's comin' here after. (*Going to rear entrance and looking out.*) He oughta be here purty soon. I stopped by the room an' packed up, in case Nifty don't see it our way.

CARRIE

All I can say, you better make yourself hard to find if Nifty shows up here.

LOU

As long as I got Chris I ain't scared o' him, or anyone else . . .

CARRIE

Well, I wash *my* hands o' you—don't forget that.

LOU

What you crabbin' about? You oughta be glad. It gets Chris outa your way. I don't see you got any kick comin'.

[CHRIS *enters. He is nervous and agitated.* LOU *rushes to him.*

LOU (*eagerly*)

Did you see Nifty? Did you tell him? (HE *doesn't reply.*) Tell me, Chris!

CHRIS

Lou, honey, we're in for it, I guess.

LOU (*stunned*)

Huh! Well, that's that . . . (*Pause.*) Oh, God, Chris, I warned you not to tell him yet. I begged you to wait. I knew how he'd take it.

CARRIE

How did he act?

CHRIS

When I got there he wasn't up yet; so I sat on the bed and said I had something to say, then I started

right in. At first he thought I was kiddin'—till I showed him the marriage certificate . . .

LOU (*absorbed*)

Yeh, then what'd he do?

CHRIS

He hit the ceiling. Oh, I expected him to do that, but then he wouldn't even let me talk to him. He just laid there like in a sort of a daze—thinkin'. After both of us stayed like that, not talking, for what seemed a mighty long time, I told him if he wasn't going to act sensible I might as well leave. And purty soon after, I did leave. . . . You know what sticks in his craw?

LOU

No.

CHRIS

He's afraid since we got married I won't be a lawyer like he wants me to. Well, shucks, I don't know's I could be a lawyer, even if I did go to all them colleges.

LOU

What did he have to say about me?

CHRIS

He wanted to know where you was, but I didn't let on I knew. No use you getting all upset. I played fair with him, told him what we done, and now if he wants to be on his high horse, we'll just do like you said, Lou, go away.

LOU (*desperately*)

We gotta, Chris!

CARRIE (*contemptuously*)

Where do you two think of goin'?

CHRIS

Lou says she'd like to try Chicago. She knows it there.

CARRIE

You can starve to death in Chi as well as anywhere else, I s'pose.

LOU

Don't worry, Carrie, we'll make out. I can do cabaret work, an' Chris, here, ain't afraid of soilin' his hands.

CHRIS

Bozo Edwards told me the other day you could nearly always get a job out at the stock yards.

LOU

We'll get along. We both got our health. (*Clutching his arm.*) Only, Chris, let's not wait. I found there's a train out at noon. (CHRIS *shakes his head, negatively.*) You know, Chris, you promised me if Nifty acted up you'd leave with me quick.

CHRIS (*sitting dejectedly on crate*)

I'd like to give Paw one more chance. Maybe when he's had time to think it over . . .

LOU

Chris, I know Nifty better'n you do. He'll never forgive us for what we done. An' the sooner we clear out, the better. What do you think, Carrie?

CARRIE

Don't ask me! You got yourself in this mess.

LOU (*turning to* CHRIS)

Lissen, honey, you hike to your room an' if Nifty's left, throw your duds in your suitcase. I'll wait for you here . . . my stuff's all ready. . . . We'll show him he can't put a crimp in us. . . . I'll tell you what you do—stop by the station and get our tickets. (CHRIS *makes a gesture of:* "*No money.*") Carrie, we ain't got a red cent to our names!

CARRIE

When you got married—did you charge it?

LOU

Chris had a ten spot, but that went for the ring an' J. P.

CARRIE

Yeah?

LOU (*suddenly remembering*)

Carrie, how about that money you owe me? That seventy-five. You only paid me twenty-five. Remember?

CARRIE

I ain't so sure I owe you anything at all—after what you an' Chris done. (*Indicating* CHRIS.) Seems to me you *got* your reward.

LOU

What are you talkin' about! You told me right in this tent you'd give me the other seventy-five after I got Chris to fall for me. . . . You know you did! [CARRIE *is dumbfounded that* LOU *makes this confession before* CHRIS.

CARRIE

You got any idea what you're sayin'?

LOU

Oh, you needn't worry. Chris knows all about it.

CARRIE

He *knows!* . . .

LOU

You don't think I'd marry him with a thing like that between us? Last night I told him just how it was —everything—how at first my vampin' him was because you hired me to.

CARRIE

You didn't!

LOU

Ask him. An' God bless him, he was big an' fine enough not to hold it against me. (*Goes to* CHRIS *and puts arm around him.*) We'll make a go of it for all our bad start, won't we, honey?

CHRIS (*reassuringly*)

You bet we will, Lou.

CARRIE

Well, I never heard the beat . . . !

LOU

I seen too many marriages go on the rocks through lies. Chris knows the worst about me. Now it's up to me to show him I got a good side, too.

CARRIE

An' you think you're goin' to get seventy-five outa me, after blabbin' your mouth like that?

LOU (*flaring up*)

You tryin' to welsh!

CARRIE

Not at all. You didn't live up to your agreement. If you'll remember right, I said I'd pay you *if* you kept your mouth shut. I'm not payin' a squealer.

LOU

So that's your game—craw-fishin'! Well, let me tell you somethin', you dirty welsher, you'll come across with that money, or I'll make you wish you had!

CARRIE

What you think you can do?

LOU

Do? I'll show you! I'll tell Nifty, that's what I'll do.

CARRIE

Don't make me laugh! You'll be lucky if he don't wring your neck.

LOU (*in a fury*)

So help me God, I'll tell him! I'm a squealer, am I? Well, wait till I get *through!* What you think Nifty'll do when he hears how you planned to get Chris away from him? Just you wait!

CARRIE

What proof you got? Did you ever think o' that?

[HAP *appears in the entrance.*

HAP

Oh, here y' are! Lou, Nifty's lookin' all over th' lot fer you this mornin'. He's sent me t' find you.

LOU

Well, you know where I am. See?

HAP (*coming down to* LOU)

What th' hell you done? Nifty acts like he wuz off his nut.

CARRIE

I'll tell you what she done! She *married papa's darlin'*—that weak, spineless boob over there.

[*Pointing to* CHRIS.

LOU (*advancing on* CARRIE)

Shut up, or I'll make your face look like sausage meat!

CARRIE (*confronting* LOU)

You an' who else!

HAP (*coming between them and separating them*)

Now—stop it! Married! Fer th' love o' Gawd!

CARRIE (*moving to entrance in the back*)

Well, if Nifty's on the lot, I guess I'll move along. Thank God, this ain't my funeral. . . . Go to it, children!

[CARRIE *goes out, laughing.*

LOU

Hap, you think Nifty's liable to come back here?

HAP

Sure he is.

[*Rushes and watches for* NIFTY *at rear entranec.*

LOU

Well, lissen, Chris, you beat it quick. Get your suitcase, then come back here for me. I'll take care of the money for our getaway some way.

CHRIS

Lou, I oughta oe here with you when he comes.

LOU

I can handle him. I ain't afraid. Hurry up, honey, for God's sake. Sneak out the back way—don't let anyone see you if you can help it.

CHRIS

Lou, see if you can get Paw to lissen to you. You can explain it better than I can.

LOU

I'll do my best, Chris. Don't you worry—everything's goin' to be all right.

[LOU *kisses him, and he goes out through flap.*

HAP

Lou, you don't mean you went an' married th' kid!

LOU

What's so funny about that? Lissen, Hap, you gotta help me. I'm up against it. How much *money* you got on you?

HAP

How much you need?

LOU

All you got, an' maybe more.

HAP (*taking out his wallet*)

What's this dough goin' fer?

LOU

To get Chris an' me to Chi. It's only a loan. You'll get it back the first money we make, honest to God you will. Didn't I always pay you back, before?

HAP

How'll twenty bucks do you?

LOU

That all you got?

HAP

Well—I—— (*Fumbling in pocket and pulling out bill.*) Here's another ten I won shootin' craps this mornin'.
[*Hands her bill.*

LOU (*taking money*)

You're a white man, Hap. You'll never know how much we need this. (*Puts money in her stocking.*) I wouldn't had to borrow it if someone hadn't welshed on me.

HAP

Don't you go sayin' nothin' to Nifty about me givin' it t' you.

LOU

Say, am I a fool?

[NIFTY *appears in the doorway. He looks at them a moment without speaking.* HAP *watches him uneasily.*

NIFTY

Beat it, Hap!

[HAP *slips out quickly, and* NIFTY *crosses to* LOU, *continuing to stare at her with an ugly, menacing look.*

NIFTY (*trembling*)

It's all I can do to keep from shovin' my fist right down your throat!

LOU

Now, lissen, Nifty. No use tryin' to scare me because I don't scare easy.

NIFTY (*grabbing her right wrist*)

What'd you do it for? Huh?

LOU (*struggling*)

Leggo me! You ain't goin' to get nowheres doin' that.

NIFTY

What'd you do it for!

LOU

Let go! (*She pulls herself away.*) I'll tell you right now, Nifty, you're barkin' up the wrong tree if you think you can bluff me. I've run up against you man-eaters before——

NIFTY

All I wanta know is—what's your game?

LOU

I ain't got no game. You don't think if I was up to any funny business I'd married him, do you? I took him because I love him.

NIFTY

A little chippy like you talkin' about love!

LOU

Look here, Nifty, you better talk to me decent, or I'll freeze up and won't even talk to you.

NIFTY

You love him, do you? Well, let me tell you somethin'—get that bunk right outa your head. An' if you're the wise one I think you are, you'll fade away double quick an' never see him again.

LOU

An' if I don't, what'll you do? . . . (*Pause.* NIFTY's *shoulders slump a bit.* LOU *senses this.*) Say, Nifty, come down to earth an' talk sense. You might as well look things square in the face. Understand, I don't

expect a kiss from you for what I done, but I also ain't goin' to stand for no strong-arm stuff. I married Chris because I love him an' he loves me. (*An exclamation of disgust from* NIFTY. *Vehemently.*) Yes, an' we're hooked up as tight as—as if we'd had a strip-carpet weddin' in a six-story church. You can threat an' swear till your lungs give out, but you won't change that.

NIFTY

You knew how I felt about Chris—what store I put by him. You knew what plans I had for him. How I've saved up for gettin' him educated. But what did you care? You come along, show your legs an' flirt, an' in a few days wreck him for life. An' me along with him.

LOU

Wreck him? I don't know about that.

NIFTY (*pacing back and forth*)

After a while with a tramp like you, I wouldn't give a thin dime for him. (*Savagely.*) Jese, there'd oughta be a special jail for broads like you—some place to lock you all up so's you could never get near a man.

LOU

You're a fine one to talk! I s'pose you always been a square-shooter with women. You always treated them like they was your own sister, didn't you? In the pig's eye! It's not so nice when it comes home to you, is it? . . . Why the hell should I consider your feelings? Did you ever think of anyone but yourself?

NIFTY

I wouldn't care so much if you'd just played around with him, but you did the lowest trick a woman can do; you hypnotized him into thinkin' he loves you. Then when you had him all hot pants you married him. . . . (*Sorrowfully.*) . . . An' he's just a kid —he don't know how to look out for himself . . .

LOU

Then what'd you leave him come on the show for? A carnival ain't just exactly my idea of a kindergarden. If you'd cared a damn about him you'd kept him on the farm. It's your fault he's runnin' away with me.

NIFTY (*startled, he advances toward her.*)

Runnin' away? Where you think you're goin'?

LOU

We're not particular. But it's a cinch we don't stay here.

NIFTY

He's not going away!

LOU

Don't forget, you drove me off this show.

NIFTY (*in a frenzy*)

Chris *don't* go!

LOU

How'll you stop him? (NIFTY *suddenly realizes that he is powerless to cope with* LOU. *He pauses.*) You can't lock him up in the closet like he was a two-year-old.

NIFTY (*hoarsely*)

For God's sake, Lou, don't take Chris away from me. Don't you see you'll ruin him? He ain't just the ordinary carnival bum. He's gotta future. With the right education he can be a big lawyer . . .

LOU

I heard him say he didn't think he wanted to be a lawyer even if he went to all them colleges. You can't just make anyone into a lawyer.

NIFTY

He ain't had enough experience to know what he wants. But I know. I can make him *amount* to somethin'. (*Almost timidly.*) Lou, what'll you take to give him up?

LOU (*a look of absolute disgust on her face*)

I thought it was about time for you to pull that one.

NIFTY

You're always broke. I'll give you enough to put you on easy street. You can find plenty other guys to marry you.

LOU (*almost frantically*)

Didn't I tell you before I love him?

NIFTY

Your lovin' him's all the more reason for lettin' him go! Your takin' him away can't come to no good. It wouldn't be but a short time till you tired o' him an' threw him over for someone else. . . . Then, where'll he be?

LOU

You're all wrong, Nifty. I been battin' around long enough to appreciate the real thing when I find it. Chris an' me are goin' to make a go of it.

NIFTY

How in Christ's name can you! He ain't your kind. He's only a green country kid that don't know what it's all about. When he wakes up he'll never forgive you for trickin' him into marryin' you.

LOU

I didn't trick him. I was on the level with him. Chris knows the worst about me.

NIFTY

Aw fer——

LOU (*savagely*)

I told him, an' he married me in spite of it. If you think I'm takin' your boy away under false pretenses, I'll give you a chance to talk to him by yourself. He's leavin' of his own free will. See if you can make him change his mind!

[*There is a long pause.*

NIFTY (*quietly*)

Where is he now?

LOU

He's up to the room packin' up.

NIFTY

You'll leave us alone?

LOU (*almost in tears*)

Sure. . . . I ain't afraid. . . . (CHRIS *enters, carrying a suitcase.*) Here he is. Go ahead, run me down to him, an' see what good it does you!

CHRIS (*after a moment*)

Well—Lou?

LOU (*smiling grimly*)

Your daddy don't seem to fancy me as his daughter-in-law.

NIFTY

Chris, I wanta talk to you. (*Turning toward* LOU.) Lou, you know what you said.

LOU (*to* CHRIS)

I'll be outside, honey, when you want me.

[LOU *starts to go.*

CHRIS

Where you goin'?

LOU

I told him I'd step out while he has his say.

CHRIS

He can say it in front of you.

LOU

Seems he'd rather not. (*Maliciously.*) I expect he's afraid of hurtin' my feelin's.

CHRIS

Well, you stay here, or I won't either . . . (*There is a long pause as* LOU *walks down right.*) What is it, Paw? (NIFTY *stares straight ahead. There is*

another pause. Rather timidly.) What you got to say to us?

NIFTY (*in a dead voice*)

Nothin' . . .nothin' at all. Go away with her. Don't ever let me see you again. She's got you—she can keep you. You ain't worth savin'!

CHRIS (*uncertainly*)

If that's the way you feel about it . . .

[CHRIS *is about to appeal once more to* NIFTY, *then* LOU *nods toward the doorway.* CHRIS *looks at her helplessly, then walks slowly to left entrance. Turns as if to speak.* LOU *silences him and motions him out. He exits.* NIFTY, *in the meantime, has sat down dejectedly on the crate.* LOU *picks up her hat and handbag; then to* NIFTY.

LOU

Here's somep'n you don't know. Carrie got me to do this. Yes—Carrie! I wouldn't have squealed on her if she hadn't welshed. She hired me to vamp him to get back at you for ditchin' her. And as far as Chris is concerned don't think he's gonna be a bum like you. I'll do more for him than you ever did.

[*She hurries from the tent left.*

[*There is a long pause.* NIFTY *slowly rises and takes a few steps right, then crosses up to trunk, then faces back center.*

NIFTY (*at rear entrance. Calling hoarsely*)

Carrie! (*In a louder voice.*) Carrie!

[*There is no answer. Then* CARRIE *appears in the doorway and steps into the tent.*

CARRIE (*apprehensively*)

What do you want, Nifty?

NIFTY (*indicating crate center*)

Set down.

CARRIE

I'm all right here. (*Without a word* NIFTY *goes to her, takes her brutally by the wrist and pulls her down stage.*) Say, what's the idea, you big bully! Let me be!

NIFTY (*holding her fast*)

Just one question I want you to answer, an' if you lie to me, as Christ is my witness, I'll kill you! (*His face close to hers.*) Did you get that little slut to take him away from me?

[SHE *stares at him transfixed with fright.*

CARRIE

You wouldn't take her word for it, would you?

NIFTY

Did you? Answer me!

CARRIE (*after a moment*)

No!

[*She sees* NIFTY'S *hand nearing her throat. She screams.*

NIFTY (*taking her by the throat*)

You're lying! You know you are!

[*He claps his hand over her mouth, and drags her to the cot, flings her down, and with animal-like growls, begins to strangle her.*

CARRIE

Nifty! Nifty! For God's sake——!

NIFTY (*with fiendish joy*)

You don't like it, do you? You oughta thought o' that! (*As her breath is cut off* CARRIE *gives a horrible guttural sound.*) You'll double-cross me, will you . . . ! Well, you'll never do it again! I'll learn you . . . ! You'll double-cross me, will you? I'll learn you . . . ! Why, you——

[*The* COLONEL *and* HAP *rush in the tent, take in the situation in an instant. The* COLONEL *throws himself full force upon* NIFTY *in his effort to make him release* CARRIE.

HAP

Nifty, for God's sake, what are you trying to do? Let go!

[*Gradually* NIFTY'S *grip relaxes. He rises, crosses shakily to a camp chair.*

CARRIE

He tried to kill me. He tried to!

HAP (*taking her by the shoulders*)

Come on, Carrie, you're all right. Give me a hand with it, Colonel.

[*The* COLONEL *and* HAP *succeed in getting* CARRIE *to her feet. She is a pitiable sight, her hair down and clothes torn.*

COLONEL

Take her over to the office-wagon. I'll be there in a minute.

HAP (*supporting her*)

Come on, Carrie . . .

CARRIE (*in a choking voice*)

He tried to kill me.

COLONEL

Go on with Hap, Carrie. I'll take care of Nifty. [HAP *takes* CARRIE *limp and reeling out of the tent.* (*To* NIFTY.) You're a fine one! I must say.

NIFTY (*in a dead voice*)

You don't know what she done. . . . You don't know anything about it . . .

COLONEL

No matter what she's done, you've got no right to do a thing like this. You'd ought to be ashamed of yourself!

NIFTY

Well, I'm *not*—I wisht I'd killed her!

COLONEL

Now that kind of talk won't do you any good. If you don't want Carrie here, why didn't you come to me and say so? We'll get rid of her.

NIFTY

I don't care what you do with her now. I'm leavin', Colonel.

COLONEL

You know you don't mean that, Nifty.

NIFTY

I'll show you whether I mean it! This is my notice.

COLONEL

Nifty, I need you! Haven't I always played square with you?

NIFTY

Oh, you've used me well enough, but I'm going just the same.

COLONEL (*thunderstruck*)

What'll you do? Where'll you go?

NIFTY (*a sob in his voice*)

What diff-rence does it make where I go? All I know is, I'm through forever with troupin'. (*Savagely.*) It's took Chris from me, an' sent him to hell! (*In a dull monotone.*) That's what your God-damn carnival's done for me!

Curtain.

ACT THREE

Scene I

Setting: The same.

Time: Saturday evening, one week later, Charleston, Ill.

At Rise: NIFTY *is sitting on the cot, smoking a cigarette. The Hawaiians are sitting on the crate playing a number for* CLEO, *who is dancing.* DOC RICE *is pacing up and down, memorizing a speech.* T-BONE *and* SAILOR *are down right.* T-BONE *is rolling dice on a small box. There is a heavy rainfall off stage. A wash-pan has been placed under a hole in the canvas roof to catch the water. The dismal drip, drip in the pan continues through most of the scene.*

CLEO (*to Hawaiians*)

Wait a minute, boys, play that chorus over again. I ain't quite certain of this routine.

[*The boys play a few bars of music and then there is a terrific clap of thunder which stops* CLEO *with her dance.*

SAILOR

What you rehearsin' for, Cleo? With this rain you ain't gonna show tonight.

CLEO

I gotta do something to pass the time. I'd go nuts up in that rooming house.

T-BONE

There, I done it again, three naturals in a row!

SAILOR

If you're so lucky, see if you can make it stop raining.

CLEO

Stop raining! I never seen such a lousy place, nothing but rain an' muck. I gotta damn good notion to hand in my notice.

NIFTY

Why don't you? Belly-dancers ain't hard to find. [NIFTY *takes drink out of hip flask.*

CLEO

Is zat so! I only come on this show as a favor to the Colonel, when Carrie left to go on the doll-rack. I wish to Gawd I'd stayed with the "Red Hot Mammas" show. At least in burley-Q you ain't wadin' knee-deep in soup all the time. (*To Hawaiians.*) Come on, boys, let's try it again.

DOC (*referring to his notes*)

"This little lady will show you how they shake their shredded wheat on that world-famous beach at——" How do you pronounce it, Nifty?

NIFTY (*sullenly*)

Waikiki—I told you before.

DOC

Wa*ikiki*—Wa*ikiki*. Jese, I never was much good on foreign languages!

SAILOR

If you'd been there and seen the dames I seen, you'd learned fast enough.

HAP (*enters rear entrance*)

I just come over from the offus-wagon. The Colonel says all of you might as well leave the lot, not a chance of opening up tonight.

DOC (*disgustedly*)

Ain't that the breaks? I got my spiel all ready too. Jese, I'm goin' up town and get stewed!

[*He exits.*

HAP

Well, Nifty, you sure picked one helluva night to get out of the show business. (NIFTY *takes another drink from flask.*) And if I was you I'd go kinda easy on that, you'll get all lushed up first thing you know.

NIFTY

What the hell you think I'm drinkin' for?

[HAP *sits on crate.*

HAP

Yer liable to get so's you'll miss yer train. . . . Not that I'm not hopin' an' wishin' you *do* miss it . . .

NIFTY

I'll ketch my train all right . . .

HAP

What time you reach home in th' mornin'?

NIFTY

I get in South Bend at four an' then lay over till six. I'll be at the farm in time for Ella to get my breakfast. An', believe me, it'll be breakfast! None o' your greasy cookhouse sinkers an' mud.

HAP (*disconsolately*)

I swear, Nifty, I dunno what this here outfit's goin' to be like without you. I'm gettin' too old t' be workin' with guys I ain't used to.

NIFTY

Doc'll get on to the ropes in time.

HAP

Doc—huh! I dunno what's th' Colonel's idea—lettin' him take over th' show. Doc Rice! Jese, he couldn't bally on a water-closet!

NIFTY

That ain't none o' my look-out! I give the old man two weeks' notice. He had plenty time to get anybody he wanted.

T-BONE

The old tight-wad's tryin' to cut down expenses.

HAP

Well, he ain't goin' to have me 'round here long. The whole damn works is shot to hell anyways. I'd as leave blow tomrow. I mean it, I'm plum fed-up.

(*Pause. He rises and crosses to* NIFTY.) Say, Nifty, what's th' chances o' me goin' along with you?

NIFTY

You—farmin', Hap!

HAP

Why not? I'm handy an' know horses. I guess you didn't know I had charge o' th' ring-stock one season over on the Beamer Shows. You wouldn't hev to give me no pay—only a piece o' change now an' then fer tobacco an' mebbe a drink.

NIFTY (*touched*)

I'd like to have you the worst way, Hap, but you ain't cut out for a hand on a farm. You'd be like a fish outa water. You wuz born for this game an' you'd be nothin' short o' miserable anywheres else.

HAP (*hotly*)

Well, how 'bout you? You wuzn't meant to be no hayseed.

NIFTY

It's diff'runt with me. I was raised on a farm. I ain't lookin' for a picnic in goin' back, but it's bettern' this. I gotta get away from everything that looks like canvas, or I'll go nuts. . . . I'm sick o' the mud, an' roughnecks an' lousy grub . . . !

SAILOR

Nifty, you'll send us a postal now an' again?

NIFTY

Sure, Sailor.

SAILOR

Yes you will! I'll bet you ferget all your old pals when you get up there on that farm. You'll get you a Ford an' a radio an' that'll be the end o' you!

HAP (*who has crossed to flap upper left and has been peering out, comes down*)

There ain't no sign o' it lettin' up. It's goin' to be hell on the boys t'night in the teardown. That midways's soft as mush.

T-BONE

Mebbe it'll clear up yet . . .

HAP (*disgustedly*)

Aw, pipe down!

NIFTY

Cleo, you might as well beat it back to your dump. It's a cinch we ain't goin' to show tonight.

CLEO (*rising*)

What you mean beat it! You want me to swim?

SAILOR (*sneeringly*)

I'll lend you my water-wings.

CLEO (*crossing to center*)

I ruined the only decent pair o' kicks I got—just walkin' over from the cookhouse. (*Holding up shoes.*) Looky here, would you!

HAP

Well, get yerself a pair o' rubber boots.

SAILOR

Well, Cleo, y' know what th' Irish do when it rains.

CLEO

What's that?

SAILOR (*elaborately*)

They let it rain!

[ALL *but* NIFTY *laugh uproariously at this old chestnut.*

CLEO

Yer about as funny as a cry for help!

[CLEO *returns to her dressing-table. As the* COLONEL *comes in rear.*

COLONEL (*sharply*)

The prop wagon's stuck in the mud up to the axles. Some of you punks get out of here and help pull it out.

[HAP *and* T-BONE *spring to their feet, and start toward the exit.*

HAP

Right with you, Colonel.

COLONEL (*to* HAP)

They're down in front of the Monkey Speedway.

SAILOR

I knowed they'd never get it off th' lot without a world o' trouble.

COLONEL

Sailor, you go along and give 'em a hand, too. Nat Brody's there, and a crew of jigs.

[HAP *and* T-BONE *go out, followed by* CLEO.

SAILOR

I should go out an' get all slathered up with mud. This here's the only suit o' clothes I got.

COLONEL

Borrow a pair of overalls off some of the boys.

SAILOR (*pained*)

For Gawd's sake, I thought I wuz hired on this show t' be a tattoo artist!

COLONEL

Artist or not! You're hired to meet any emergency that comes along.

SAILOR

But, Colonel——!

COLONEL

Now, no more talk—come on with me.

[COLONEL *exits, followed by* SAILOR, *who as the* COLONEL *goes out shakes his fist at him. Then crossing down to* NIFTY.

SAILOR

I'll see you again, Nifty, afore you blow. Say, here's a little somethin' want you t' hev—t' remember me by. (*Pulling a heavy watch-chain out of his pocket.*) It ain't much, but take it along with you. . . . I got it off a Greek shootin' craps.

NIFTY

Hell, Sailor, I don't want your chain!

SAILOR (*pressing it on him*)

Go ahead, take it. It ain't no good to me. I ain't gotta watch t' wear on it. (MAW BENSON *enters, rear. As* SAILOR *exits.*) Hello, Maw.

[SAILOR *exits, rear entrance.*

[MAW *crossing down to* NIFTY.

MAW

Nifty, I ain't come to say goodbye. . . . I don't believe in goodbyes. . . . (*She hands him a postal-card.*) I want you to see somethin'. Looky what come in the mail this afternoon.

NIFTY (*looking at card*)

What is it?

MAW

A card from Lou and Chris. They're both O. K.

NIFTY (*takes card, stares at it a moment and crumples it up in his hand, and crosses right. Surreptitiously, putting it in his coat pocket*)

What the hell do I care!

MAW

Nifty, I gotta hunch she'll make somethin' outa Chris.

NIFTY (*bitterly*)

She'll make somethin' o' him all right! A bum! I see it clear now, Maw. Y' know what his trouble

wuz? There was too much o' me in him. He couldn't fight down my ornriness.

[*He sits dejectedly in chair right.*

MAW

It may turn out to be a God's blessin' Chris run off with Lou—if it wakes you up to what a losin' game you been playin' all your life. I wisht I'd had somethin' to jar me loose before it was too late. (*With an effort.*) Say, Nifty, you goin' away without sayin' goodbye to Carrie? (NIFTY *remains silent.*) Are you sure you're shootin' square—to go off like this without a word?

NIFTY (*darkly*)

All I want from her is to keep the hell outa my way.

MAW

Whatever she done, right or wrong, it was because she loved you. God knows, it wasn't in her mind to drive the kid away.

NIFTY (*angrily*)

Say, don't think I can't see through all this gab! Carrie's sent you over to beg for her.

MAW

That's where you're all wet. Carrie don't have to get nobody to talk for her. The only thing, Nifty, if she comes to say goodbye, don't be hard-nosed. Treat her decent. Tell her you forgive her, whether you do or not. It won't hurt you, an' it'll save her many a heartache.

NIFTY

Hell, Maw, you sound like a Salvation Army preacher. . . . But you don't make me chicken-hearted with this Sunday-school talk. They can't ruin my life an' expect a kiss for it. . . . She's gettin' just what's comin' to her.

[*During the last speech* CARRIE *has entered rear, unnoticed. Her face is haggard; she has lost her spirit. There is a kind of desperate calmness about her.*

CARRIE

I knowed that wuz how you felt, but I had to come all the same . . .

NIFTY (*starting*)

Well, what do you want?

CARRIE

I wanta talk to you.

NIFTY (*rising*)

We got nothin' to say.

MAW (*forcing* NIFTY *back into chair*)

You lissen to her, Nifty, or so help me God, I'll—— (*Changing tone.*) Well, I'm goin' now, an' I wanta hear you two get some sense in your heads an' part friends. This here's a short life an' a rotten one, an' we don't know what's ahead. What right have we got to pass judgment on anyone else? . . . Well, Nifty—take care o' yourself.

[MAW *kisses him maternally, and hurriedly goes out, rear.*

NIFTY (*sitting and staring in front of him*)

What you got to say to me?

CARRIE (*jerkily*)

Understand, first o' all, I ain't here with any idea o' gettin' you to make it up with me. There's just somethin' I wanta explain, an' now I'm here I don't know how to go about it hardly. . . . I oughta written you a letter, I guess . . .

NIFTY

I wouldn't read it.

CARRIE

I didn't think you would . . . that's why I come. (*With extreme effort.*) Nifty, I gotta bottle o' carbolic acid from the drugstore today. . . . A bottle that's goin' to be empty this time tomorrow.

NIFTY (*with a sneer*)

What you tryin' to do—throw a scare into me?

CARRIE

I ain't grand-standin' an' I'm tellin' you what I'm goin' to do so's you'll—well, so's you'll see I ain't such a bad sport at that. Your beaten' me up an' kickin' me off the show made me all o' a sudden see what I'm up against. I see how much I harmed you by siccin' Lou on Chris. An' when I heard you wuz leavin' the outfit through what I done, I made up my mind I wuzn't goin' to have you believin' I got off scot free. I want you to see I ain't no piker, an' I can take my medicine——

NIFTY

How's your drinkin' poison goin' to bring Chris back, or help? You're crazy.

CARRIE

I may be, but I see things purty clear for a crazy person. . . . It ain't as if I wuz something who had somethin' to live for. Mebbe I wouldn't be so nervy about it then. But what I got to hang on for? I'm a nobody—tired out an' broke. I'd like to think you could forgive me, Nifty, but that ain't goin' to change my mind none. You see, I ain't doin' this so much for you as for myself. The others'll think I done it because you left me. But I don't care what they think if you understand that that ain't the real reason.

[HAP *rushes in excitedly.*

HAP

Hey, Nifty, what you think—it's stopped rainin', an' it's clearin' off! (HAP *sees* CARRIE *and stops short, but he recovers in a moment, so anxious is he to tell* NIFTY *the good news.*) It's stopped rainin', d'ya hear? An' there's the purtiest moon comin' up you ever seen. Big as a washtub.

NIFTY

It's too late—it won't do us no good if it does turn clear.

[T-BONE *enters hurriedly, followed by* CLEO *who goes to dressing-table.* CARRIE *stares at her in a daze.*

T-BONE

Nifty, did Hap tell you we're openin' up?

HAP

What you think I am—a sap like you? Lissen, Fallen Arches, you skip out an' corral the jigs.

T-BONE

Aw, I gotta get a shovel.

HAP (*hurrying* T-BONE *out*)

You'll get more than a shovel! (*Turning to* NIFTY.) I never seen sech a guy fer allus havin' alibis. The Colonel sent the band-boys up town to bally. The old midway'll be hummin' with people in an hour. You see if it ain't so! It ain't goin' to be such a bad break fer you yer last night at that—— Aw, Nifty. (*This is a pause. Suddenly the merry-go-round is heard in the distance.*) Lissen. There goes th' old hobby-horses! Lissen!

NIFTY (*after a pause*)

Hap, get Doc.

[DOC *enters excitedly.*

DOC

Hey, Nifty, did you know, we're opening up.

NIFTY

Got your spiel ready?

DOC (*taking paper from pocket*)

Know it like a book. It's a cinch!

NIFTY

Right away.

HAP

I'll go long out an' light up the stringers on th' front, Nifty.

[HAP *exits. As* NIFTY *calls to him.*

NIFTY

Get the jigs. An' while you're at it, take them wet tarpaulins off the platforms an' ticket-box. (NIFTY *notices* CLEO.) Well, why the hell ain't you gettin' into your clothes? You work here, don'tcha?

CLEO (*crossing to dressing-table*)

Needn't bite my head off! I'll be ready.

[*During the ensuing dialogue* CLEO *busies herself at the dressing table.*

DOC

What you doin' over here, Carrie?

NIFTY (*sternly*)

Lissen Doc, you got all you can do tendin' to your own business. You got that spiel ready?

DOC (*confidently*)

Know it like a book. It's a cinch.

NIFTY

Run a little o' that spiel for me. We got time.

DOC (*jumping on cot and orating elaborately but very hurriedly*)

You are now standin' in front of the big feature show of the midway. The biggest show for your money, that has ever played your town. It's a show full of spicy dancing, a show full of peppy dancing.

NIFTY

Put some steam in it! You ain't thinkin' what you're sayin'. Don't talk just words, get right down an' tell 'em about it—believe it yourself! (CLEO *crosses to* NIFTY *in her Hawaiian costume. As* CARRIE *sees her in her old costume she is visibly affected.*) (*To* CLEO.) Well, what d'you want?

CLEO

I need somebody to hook up my shredded wheat. I can't get the hang of this damn fastener.

NIFTY

Get Carrie to help you. Go on, Doc.

CLEO (*eyeing* CARRIE)

Carrie? Nix, she's lookin' at me now like she'd like to stick a knife in me.

NIFTY (*pushing her away*)

Aw, yer cuckoo! Get over there . . . give Cleo a hand, Carrie.

CARRIE

Come here, Cleo.

[CLEO *crosses to* CARRIE, *cautiously turns her back for* CARRIE *to fasten her dress.*

NIFTY (*turning to* DOC)

Begin with introducin' the performers.

DOC (*with a gesture*)

Introducin' Princess Kalima, the pride of sunny Honolulu! (*The* THREE HAWAIIANS *enter, get their instrument cases, and exit.*) This little lady will

show you how they shake their shimmies on that world-famous beach at Wai-Wai—

NIFTY

Waikiki! I told you twenty times already.

DOC

Waikiki. When she dances she makes the old men young an' the young men old. You'll be entertained by the Royal Hawaiian Trio playin' melodies from those far-off islands in the Pacific Ocean, an' if you don't say when you come out that it's the biggest show you've ever saw——

NIFTY (*during this last speech has been watching* CARRIE. SHE *has been trying vainly to help* CLEO *with her costume. She is almost blinded with tears*)

Wait a minute, Doc . . . what's eatin' on you, Carrie?

CARRIE (*wiping her eyes guiltily*)

Nothin'. . . . It's too dark in here to see very well. (*Rising.*) That oughta hold, Cleo. . . . Well, if I'm goin' to open up tonight, I gotta be gettin' back to the doll rack. (*Coming up to Nifty.*) I'll say goodb—so long, Nifty. . . . (*Turns to go, then faces him again.*) Wanta shake hands?

NIFTY (*stiffly*)

I guess we can do without that. . . . (CARRIE *turns and almost stumbles toward the exit.* CLEO *watches her curiously.* NIFTY *stares straight in front of him. During this interruption* DOC *retreats to one side where he greedily runs through his lines. As* CARRIE

steps on platform.) Carrie. . . . (*Turning.*) Carrie! Come here!

[CARRIE *turns and comes down slowly.*

CARRIE

What you want, Nifty . . . ?

NIFTY (*avoiding her gaze*)

How'd you like to go on tonight—in place o' Cleo?

CLEO (*indignantly*)

Say, how do you get that way?

NIFTY

Shut up, Cleo!

CARRIE

Go on tonight . . . ?

NIFTY

You heard me. Do your stuff for the last time.

CARRIE (*a sob in her throat*)

Nifty . . . !

NIFTY (*crossly*)

It's just an idea o' mine. What do you say?

CARRIE

I gotta work the doll rack.

NIFTY

I'll fix that up with the Colonel. Well . . . ?

CARRIE (*trembling*)

Think I got time to get ready?

NIFTY

If you don't stand here talkin' all night. Cleo, climb out a that grass an' hand it over to Carrie.

CLEO

I'll be damned if I do! My contract says——

NIFTY

Now keep your shirt on! We're givin' you the night off, that's all.

CLEO

You ain't got no right to do this—you're quittin', an'——

NIFTY (*advancing menacingly*)

Lissen, sister, I'm in charge o' this outfit till I leave the lot. Get me?

CLEO (*in a rage*)

I mighta knowed I oughta had better sense than come work for a bunch o' gorillas on a carnival!

[CLEO *crosses to dressing-table, viciously tearing off the costume as she goes.* CARRIE *follows after her. They both go back of curtain up right.* HAP *rushes in excitedly.*

HAP

Nifty, they're startin' to come on the lot! Ain't it time we started the bally?

NIFTY

All right, Doc. Get out there. Give 'em all you got!

DOC (*rushing out*)

Leave it to me!

NIFTY (*to* HAP)

Where're the jigs?

HAP

They're there! They won't hold us up.

NIFTY

We'll have to wait a minute on Carrie.

HAP (*aghast*)

Who?

NIFTY

You heard me.

HAP

Carrie!

CARRIE (*thinking he is calling her*)

I'm almost ready, Hap.

NIFTY

You think I've gone nuts, don'tcha, Hap? Well, I ain't. Tonight I'm goin' to be with the hicks, an' watch you do your stuff. So you all better give me a damn good show or God help you!

[*During the last few speeches the ballyhoo is heard. This noise continues through as the scene changes.*

Curtain.

ACT THREE

Scene II

Scene: The front of the Hawaiian Show.

Time: A short time later.

At Rises: Off-stage is heard the usual carnival noises; the shooting-gallery, the high-striker, the merry-go-round, etc. On the bally platform stand the HAWAIIAN TRIO, *playing and singing loudly.* CARRIE *in her old costume of "shredded wheat," is doing a few steps to the music. The outside free exhibition is in progress.*

Above the music T-BONE *at the entrance and* HAP *inside the ticket-box are shouting: "Right this way folks!"* DOC RICE *is beckoning to the crowd from the platform. A group of townsfolk, in raincoats and with umbrellas, stand before the attraction watching the performers. On the edge of the crowd, left,* NIFTY *is seen, watching the proceedings nervously. No one pays any attention to him . . . as the music stops,* DOC *picks up the megaphone and begins his "spiel."*

DOC (*plainly ill-at-ease*)

Ladies and gentlemen, you've seen our free outside exhibition, an' now I'm goin' to ask you to step in a little closer, so's I can tell you just what we got to entertain you on the inside. (*Impressive pause.*) You are now standing in front of the big feature attraction of the midway. The biggest show for your money that has ever played your town. It's a show

full of spicy dancing, a show full of peppy dancing. An' with your kind indulgence allow me to introduce the artists. First introducing Princess Kalima, the pride of Sunny Honolulu! (CARRIE *steps forward and bows in acknowledgment of the introduction.* DOC *is fast becoming rattled; he hesitates sometime before continuing. The* COLONEL *strolls on, L. and stands beside* NIFTY *who is so absorbed in listening to the debut of his pupil that he doesn't notice him.*) Aah—aah—Well as I said before, she's the pride of Sunny Honolulu. An' believe me, she's good! She can dance along with the best of them.

NIFTY (*aside to the* COLONEL)

God, he's dyin' on his feet!

[HAP *pantomimes to* DOC *to introduce the* TRIO.

DOC

Then, next we have the Hawaiian Three. A bunch of boys that will please you and tease you with their haunting melodies. If you don't like 'em, then, you don't know what's good music.

[*Several of the townspeople move away.*

COLONEL (*to* NIFTY)

Get up there, and show him how to do it!

[NIFTY *shakes his head.*

DOC (*growing more rattled every minute*)

If you're lookin' for Billy Sunday and his tabernacle, then *don't buy tickets.* (*This is too much for* NIFTY, *he hesitates no longer, elbowing his way through the crowd, he jumps on the platform, pushing* DOC *aside.*

He holds up his hand, and the crowd instantly becomes attentive once more.) but if you're looking for a half hour of—of—of the best fun and amusement you've ever set through——

[*By this time* NIFTY *has pushed* DOC *off the platform.*

NIFTY (*in a voice clear and distinct*)

Now, folks, just a minute, just a minute! As Shakespeare said, "You ain't seen nothing yet." Don't go 'way. (*Pointing to* CARRIE.) There she is, Princess Kalima, the Pride of Sunny Honolulu. And when she dances, folks, she makes old men throw away their canes and cripples lose their crutches. She shakes a mean bale of alfalfa. Now don't misconstrue me when I refer to the young lady's dance, because this show is clean, moral, up-to-date, educational and instructive and—as a special advertising price tonight—just to prove to you the great value of this performance, I'm not going to charge the customary price of twenty-five cents—but a dime—ten cents. It's something you can't afford to miss so step right up folks. All ready—the performers retire and the show starts right away!

[*With* NIFTY's *last words, the* HAWAIIAN TRIO *gives a shout, and with* CARRIE *go into the tent.* T-BONE *and* HAP *take up the cry of "All ready, a dime, ten cents!"* T-BONE *turns and starts the unafon.* NIFTY *seems to draw the people toward the box-office with his gesturing. The crowd, almost to a man, file up to the box-office, and after purchasing tickets, pass into the tent.* NIFTY *keeps up the patter of "All ready a dime, ten cents—the big feature show of the*

midway" until most of the crowd has entered the tent. The COLONEL *stands watching him with genuine admiration.*

COLONEL (*stepping up*)

Nifty, my congratulations! You certainly saved the day.

DOC

I can do it, Colonel, soon's I get the hang of it a little better.

NIFTY

Hell, Doc, you'll never get on to it! You just ain't got the knack. You ain't got a sellin' personality. When you bally you gotta tell the world!

COLONEL

I'm afraid Nifty's right, Doc. You better go back to your Japanese ball game.

DOC

Hell's fire! That's what I call a raw deal.
[DOC *exits left.*

COLONEL (*cunningly*)

Nifty, you were superb! If you'll reconsider your going away, I'll make you a partner. (*Hesitatingly.*) I'll give you a quarter interest in this outfit.

NIFTY (*a bit boastfully*)

Well, I don't wanta see the show go on the rocks.

COLONEL

Good! I'll go over to the office-wagon and make out a contract.

NIFTY

No hurry about that. I've gotta think it over.

COLONEL

Well, I'll just have one here, in case—Nifty, you're too old a dog to learn new tricks . . .

[COLONEL *delightly hurries out left.*

[*During the last few speeches* HAP *and* T-BONE *have been straining their ears to overhear what* NIFTY *is saying.* CARRIE *steals out of the tent, unnoticed and stands in the tent entrance.*

NIFTY (*turning, sees* CARRIE)

Well, what do you want?

CARRIE

I was just wonderin', since you're goin' to stay on, an' all . . .

NIFTY (*indignantly*)

Who says I'm goin' to stay on?

CARRIE

Well, if you do stay on, I was wonderin' if you couldn't see your way clear to lettin' me come back on the job?

NIFTY

You don't want much, do you? Yeah, an' the first thing I know you'll be wantin' to—— Well, you can finish out the night, but I ain't makin' no promises. (*To* HAP and T-BONE *who have done a pantomime handshake. Sharply.*) An' I'll tell you punks one thing, if I do stay on, there's goin' to be more work

done around here. You're all so lazy you're not worth a chaw o' tobacco! Call out them jigs, Carrie. We gotta get that tent full. (*He turns away.* CARRIE *doesn't answer. He turns again and sees her.*) Well, did you hear what I said? God damn it, I'm the boss of this outfit! Get the hell in there!

CARRIE (*a sob in her voice*)

Oh, Nifty—them's the first kind words you said to me in a month!

[*She hurries into the tent.* NIFTY *sits on platform left.*

NIFTY (*to* T-BONE)

Call out them jigs. (T-BONE *exits into the tent.* NIFTY *takes card out of his pocket, and inspects it.* (*To* HAP.) Hap, listen to this.

HAP

What is it?

NIFTY

A card from Chris, and Lou.

HAP

No!

NIFTY

Lou's got a job, hoofin' it in a night club and Chris is workin' in an office.

HAP

Yeah?

NIFTY

And Hap—it's a law office.

[*The Hawaiian music inside the tent slowly crescendos as the curtain falls.*

Curtain.

GLOSSARY OF CARNIVAL ARGOT

Punk—A canvasman.
Nipple—A beginner.
Bally—To drum up a crowd.
Shindig—A dance.
Fin—A dollar bill.
Saw-buck—A ten dollar bill.
C—$100.
Frog-skins—Green-backs.
Slough—To close the show, an arrest.
Gorilla—A rowdy.
Juice joint—Soft drink stand.
Grease joint—Hot sandwich stand.
Mitt joint—Fortune teller's tent.
On the cuff—A charged account.
Racket—Any form of concession on a show.
Gaff—A dishonest gaming device.
Pad room—Waiting room for performers.
Boz-woz—Braggadocio.
Frail—Young woman.
Grifter—Grafter.
Dukie—Meal ticket.
Put the bee on—To make a touch.
Midway Confab—News column in the *Billboard*, the weekly trade paper for outdoor show-folk.
Ten-in-One—The side show.
Clam shells—Silver dollars.
Jig—A negro.

Flash—A concessionaire's display.
Mud showman—A carnival man.
Top money—Large gate receipts.
Rag front—Painted canvas banners.
Blow-off—A performance for men only.
Slum—Cheap jewelry.
Grind show—One having a continuous performance.
Corn game—The carnival's version of Lotto.
Hobby-horses—Merry-go-round.
Red one—Good business.
Bloomer—Bad business.
Swing—Ferris wheel.
Shill—A decoy for the townspeople.
Make an opening—Attract the crowds.
Get lushed up—Become intoxicated.
Creeper—A modification of the roulette wheel.
Cook-house—Dining-tent.
Gimmick—(See gaff).
Strong arm—Dishonest method.
Gilley outfit—A very small carnival.
Sharpshooter—A seasoned trooper.
Fish—Townspeople.
Keester—Suitcase.
Get a plaster—Show attached by sheriff.